



Community Corrections – Department of Probation and Parole – Harrisonburg (District 39)

Placement Description

Parole/Probation supervision of offenders in the community. Prefer student to work 10-15 hours per week and prefer students who are outgoing and assertive. Students must pass a drug test and criminal background investigation and be fingerprinted. Examples of activities performed/observed by interns include, but are not limited, to shadowing P.O. office appointments, conducting home visits, visiting supervisees at the jail, engaging in discussions with local law enforcement, making referrals to treatment providers, collecting urines screens, and more.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Court Observations
- Home visits with criminal offenders
- Employment contacts/Community Contacts
- Observe and perform interview at the jail and the Probation Office
- Assist with probation reports
- Learn to perform investigations
- Learn to keep case notes & proper case management

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Fall 2023 – Brianna Thomas

For the 2023 Fall semester, I interned at the District 39 Probation office in Harrisonburg, Va. The District 39 office believes “to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all.” While I was interning at D39, I was able to witness this mission statement come to life. The office supervises 1,802 offenders and aids them with resources that allow them to reintegrate into the community without committing crimes. To do so, the D39 office supervises offenders through office contacts, telephone contacts, and home contacts. The D39 office conducts urine screens, which detect drug and alcohol use for offenders when they come into the office to meet with their probation officer, or sometimes, offenders are screened randomly. The D39 office works with community resources such as the Community Service Board, BrightView, and Gemeinschaft Home to help offenders stay in compliance with their probation conditions by providing shelter, helping them stay drug- and alcohol-free, and providing mental health resources.

As an intern at D39, I gained many skills that expanded my knowledge of the correctional and justice system and general skills that I can apply to my future career. The first skill I learned was how to perform a urine screen. My supervisor watched me conduct them the first few times to ensure I did everything properly. Over time, I was trusted to perform the screens for my advisor by myself, and then other probation officers had me conduct drug screens for their probationers. Another great opportunity that I was able to experience was going to court. While interning at D39, I went to court three times with my supervisor and two other probation officers on separate occasions. From attending court, I was able to understand better how the court system operates and how probation officers play a role in it. Being able to go on home contacts was my favorite part about interning at D39; even though it did not happen often, I enjoyed being in action and seeing my supervisors show authority and work with police officers. Another skill I learned was how to operate CORIS, the Virginia Department of Correction system where all offender information can be found and inputted. Using CORIS, I could input offender information and intake forms through COMPAS, a part of CORIS.

Overall, I loved being an intern at D39, but there are advantages and disadvantages. I appreciated the closeness of the staff and the camaraderie they have with each other. We often had lunch together and could talk about topics other than work. The staff and officers at D39 genuinely want to see you succeed and are more than willing to help you do that. As a psychology major with zero knowledge of working in an office setting or the correctional system, my supervisors were very patient with me and helped me whenever I asked. At times, my supervisors did not have anything planned, or they were just having a slow day, leaving me with little to do. I wish I could have interned under other officers for the days my supervisors did not have much going on. I also felt limited to doing CORIS work most of the time I spent interning. I do not think anyone is at fault for my limitations, but I do wish I could have gone to jail more or gone on more home visits.

My site taught me how to conduct myself in the office setting. I learned to be consistent and productive in the work setting and also in my everyday life. My site also taught me how to deal with people who are troubled. Many offenders often lie or do not show up to their



appointments or test positive for drugs on their urine screens when they tell us that they would be clean. I intend to become a clinical psychologist, so learning these skills will benefit me while dealing with clients and others in the work setting.

Being a Psychology major has helped me better understand how people operate and observe behaviors. There was an instance where one of my supervisors took me to visit a female inmate who was PB-15'd (where a probation officer issues a warrant for an offender's arrest) by another officer for fentanyl usage. While talking to her in the cell, my supervisor asked her about the bruises on her arms and face. The woman told us a different reason than what she told her probation officer. After we talked to her, my supervisor asked me what I observed about the inmate during our interaction. From taking what I have learned from my psych classes, I could tell her what I thought might be happening in the inmate's life. Many of the probation officers at D39 have received their degree in psychology, which I found pretty interesting. Still, the more I began to intern at D39, the more I saw how psychology plays a role in being a probation officer.

While I interned at D39, I noticed that the probation officers around me dealt with a heavy caseload that contained offenders of different risk levels and mental health cases. I was concerned that the heavy caseload would cause a higher employee burnout risk and lower employee mental well-being. I researched methods that would combat these risks, which led me to the idea of a peer support network. When I wrote my contribution paper, I spoke on employee burnout for probation officers and mental well-being because of what I witnessed and how a peer support network might ease some of the stress that the probation officers at D39 might be dealing with. I created an info poster with steps and tips on creating a peer support network in the workplace. I presented my idea and contribution to one of my supervisors, along with a physical copy of my research paper. Unfortunately, I could not see the implementation of my contribution before my time at D39 ended. Still, I am hopeful that there will be a positive change in the office.

For anyone considering interning at District 39, I would like them to know that they will learn, grow, and create relationships with the officers and the staff. I thought that when I first interned at D39, I would not gain anything from it because it isn't "psychology" enough like my peers' sites. However, I was pleasantly proved wrong. Interning at D39 will show you just how much psychology surrounds us.

Spring 2020 – Keely Skelton

The mission statement of Harrisonburg District 39-Department of Probation and Parole is "to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all." The goals of this department are to monitor the behavior probationers, providing them with ample resources for support and rehabilitation throughout their reintegration process back into the community, while still prioritizing the safety of the community throughout. Aspects of supervision as required by the state of Virginia include office visits, telephone contacts, home visits, community contacts with the family, employer, or someone else in the community familiar with the recent behavior of the probationer, as well as urine screens, mental health screens, drug treatment therapy, and referrals to third-party facilities that offer services beneficial to the successful completion of the probationary period.



Though my time with Harrisonburg Department of Probation and Parole-District 39 was cut short due to the restrictions surrounding the Coronavirus, I was still able to perform many tasks that were new to me, as well as observe many environments that I would not have been able to experience otherwise. I was able to work closely with the Senior Probation Officer while she tended to the remaining offenders on her caseload, but was also given the opportunity to work with one of the Sex Offender Officers at the department at the start of the term. Some of the roles I was able to step-into during my brief time there included contacting probationers to schedule office visits, observing these office visits, conducting urine screens, attending court, and making home visits. Towards the end of my time, I was also able to reorganize files to make locating information easier for one of the officers that had just been hired; allowing me to see the extent of these officer's record-keeping as well as gain some insight into the details of specific offenders' pasts. Had I been able to complete my internship with District 39, I would have also been given the opportunity to meet one-on-one with offenders to set them up on a shadowtrack system. This is a system used for offenders that are deemed low risk meaning they require the lowest level of supervision, and allows them to do monthly check-ins via telephone with an automated system to help alleviate some of the officer's intense workload, as well as spare the probationers the time commitment of monthly or bimonthly office visits.

These intense workloads were one of the disadvantages of the department I observed while interning there. At least while I was there, the offender-officer ratio did not seem to be ideal for anyone there, but they had just hired a new officer when I had to leave and I believe had another one undergoing training that would soon be joining them to take on some of the heavier caseloads. Since one of my responsibilities was to conduct phone calls to offenders to schedule their next office visits, it was also apparent to me that many of them had not been seen in months. When the caseloads are so extensive, it is very difficult for the officer to keep up with who has been seen and who has not because they have so much on their plate. Offenders are also not all that great at sticking to an appointment, so this makes maintaining a schedule much more difficult for the officers. Because of the high demands of the job for each offender, the length of the officer's caseload has a lot of control over what their hours are. Though the office itself is open for a set time frame, it seemed as though every officer worked late or on weekends to keep up with these demands. It is clearer to me now than ever that it is a high-stress job working as a probation officer, but the officers that make up this department do an excellent job of managing that stress, keeping the effects of these pressures out of sight from the offenders; and through it all, they never treat any of their offenders as disposable or 'less-than' despite the circumstances. Given the level of stress they endure on a daily basis, they are still able to provide countless services to the probationers to give them the best chance possible at reintegrating back into society with a lesser chance of recidivating. One major advantage of this department is the amount of services it offers the offenders. They are constantly referring the offenders that have the capabilities to provide better care or assistance where District 39 may fall short in their rehabilitation services. However, directly through District 39, offenders are able to attend therapy that is paid for by the department so long as they regularly attend their meetings. On top of this, a master list was in the process of being created by one of the Sex Offender Officers there to provide sex offenders with resources and facilities whose services were available to them.



This included things such as housing, therapy, support groups, employment, etc. and would allow them to quickly access resources that are rather difficult to find with a sex offender status.

This field placement site did a wonderful job of helping me figure out what I want to do with my future. While of course I believe it would have helped me out more had I been able to finish out my semester with these officers, the time I was able to have was still beneficial to me in the end. While I am currently working on completing my Bachelors in psychology with a minor in criminal justice, I always saw myself using the criminal justice aspect of my degree more. However, after this experience that required me to put my skills into practice, I realized that I actually do take more interest in the psychology side of things as I was always searching for the reasons that the probationers committed the offenses in the first place rather than prioritizing their adherence to the conditions of their supervision. That being said, the officers at this department were extremely welcoming and kind to me while I learned, and ultimately made my short time with them a very pleasurable experience. It was such a pleasure getting to intern there and taught me a lot about what I value and where I'd like my life to go. This site will hold you to high standards that will encourage you to learn and perform new tasks, building your professionalism and developing your skill set as you grow.

Fall 2018 – Emily Murtha

Harrisonburg, District #39 Probation and Parole's mission is to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all. The goals of District #39 are to supervise the behavior of 1,285 offenders, while providing them with resources to be able to potentially reenter the community successfully and live life without crime. The monitoring of these offenders includes personal office contacts, telephone contacts, home visits, urine screens, referrals to facilities like the Community Services Board, substance abuse counseling, or mental health therapy to help them get back on track.

Throughout my time at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole, I was able to perform many tasks that I never thought I would be doing as an intern. Luckily, for me, one probation officer was on leave during the time I was interning, so I helped and was able to step in to her role, during the days I was working. I worked closely with one of the Senior Probation Officer's on her caseload, while she was absent, and was able to really experience first-hand what it is like to work in a probation and parole office. During my time at District #39, I was able to conduct a few home visits at offender's houses with other probation officers, observed court hearings for our district's cases, contacted community members and employers about concerns regarding our offenders, assisted with probation reports using the Virginia Department of Corrections system called CORIS, conducted urine screens, met one-on-one with offenders, and scheduled appointments with offenders over the phone. And because I was in charge of a caseload, I was able to be independent and make decisions about who I wanted to make appointments with and who needed a drug test or who didn't.

I noticed while working there that the probation officers have very heavy caseloads they are responsible for. I spoke to a few officers who claimed that they at times will be called in to work on the weekends and way past the regular "eight to five" shift. There seems to be no work-



life balance at District #39 and a lot feel overworked and stressed, which affects their relationships and home lives. This gave me the idea for what I was going to focus on for my contribution project. I decided to construct surveys for the offenders and the employees about their feelings toward the program and what they want to be fixed in order for their lives to be successful. This survey was anonymous, and I proposed distributing it a few times a year, to see how the office is improving. The offenders and probation officers work hand-in-hand. The fewer offenders on one officer's case load means more time for them to focus on their own offenders. I was able to speak to some offenders about the program and some of them mentioned the lack of time they see or hear from their probation officer. I have had phone calls from probationers asking for appointments because they haven't been contacted in six months. I also made checklists to hang around the office to help remind officers to take care of themselves and to remember to acknowledge the offenders who aren't a top priority. And lastly, I found a TED talk on the meaning of work-life balance that I shared with the office to give another perspective on how the two operate together and when one is causing stress, it will negatively affect the other. Hopefully, my contribution will help the Probation and Parole office lessen the caseloads per officer and pay more attention to all offenders because if not then the mission statement isn't being followed.

At every field placement site, there will be advantages and disadvantages. For me, I really enjoyed the independence I was granted while working at District 39. I was in charge of my schedule for every day, and was able to be flexible with how my day went. For example, I scheduled what offenders would come in and when and if I needed to conduct urine screens or home visits or not. The freedom really taught me that I am capable of working in this type of environment and it helped build my self-confidence being placed in an unfamiliar field that I am not comfortable with. Unfortunately, the freedom and independence wasn't always the best thing for me. At times, I would have questions or nothing to do in the office and would look for help on what to do with my time. The probation officers are always on the move and constantly in and out of the building, so sometimes the help I needed wasn't readily available. My advice for future interns would be to schedule out appointments and your duties over a long period of time, so you have at least something to do every time you are there.

This field placement really showed me what I want to pursue in my future career. I learned that even though I am very intrigued by the criminal justice system, I am more interested in the field of psychology. I am a psychology major with a criminal justice minor and by working at District 39, I realized that I am more drawn to the question of "why" people do things, rather than punishing them for doing things. It was a pleasure working at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole this semester and if I had the chance to turn back time and choose another field placement, I wouldn't because I developed my interpersonal skills with a different population of people and learned more about myself through the process.

Spring 2018 – Karly Hopkins

Harrisonburg (District #39) Probation and Parole's mission statement is "to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and



respect for all.” The goal and purpose of the agency is to supervise and monitor the behavior of roughly 1,300 probationers, while providing them with the necessary resources to successfully reenter the community and lead crime-free lives. The supervision of these offenders can include personal office visits, home visits, conducting urine screens, fingerprint analysis, and referring clients to necessary facilities like the Community Services Board, substance abuse counseling, or mental health therapy.

During my semester-long internship at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole, I was able to observe and assist in all or most of a probation officer’s supervision responsibilities. I began my experience by shadowing several probation officers around the agency, and sitting in on personal office visits with their clients. I quickly gained confidence and independence and began conducting my own personal office visits with clients in a vacant caseload that I managed, with the assistance of my supervisor. I met with offenders based on their level of supervision. I would see someone every two-three weeks if they were on elevated supervision, every month for medium level, and every two-three months for low supervision status. During these meetings, I would discuss each client’s case plan and progress. I would also work with new clients to create case plans. These plans are basically a unique set of goals that the offender would like to accomplish while serving his or her time on probation. Examples of these goals would be to gain and maintain full time employment, refrain from drug or alcohol use, build positive relationships, and stay away from negative peers and influences. I would also make sure they were following all of their probation conditions, such as paying their court costs each month, or attending mandatory counseling sessions. If needed, I would refer clients to the appropriate facilities, such as homeless shelters, mental health or substance abuse counseling, community service locations, etc. I would also observe and collect urine screens for drug testing purposes. I collected notes during these meetings and then logged them into the Virginia community corrections database called CORIS. CORIS is used for a variety of things, from conducting evaluations, to accessing a client’s criminal history. I also accompanied probation officers on home visits throughout Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. This was interesting because I got to see all of the areas outside of the “JMU bubble” and where the clients come from. It was also nice to get out of the office every now and then. I also spent some of my time observing court proceedings at the Rockingham County Circuit Court. One day at court, Judge Albertson noticed me observing, introduced himself, and invited me to his chambers to discuss any questions I had; it was super cool. Another interesting task I observed was a mental health evaluation by the District 39 Probation and Parole Mental Health Clinician, Mike Fatula. If there were clients who needed to be referred to mental health therapy, Mike would sit in during our personal office visits and briefly evaluate the client in order to refer them to the appropriate counseling services. As a psychology major, this was one of my favorite aspects of the internship.

This internship experiences was extremely rewarding, and I was incredibly grateful to be given this opportunity. I enjoyed working with all of the District 39 staff, and getting to know all of the clients that are served. The staff was tremendously helpful and kind towards me and never hesitated to assist me with any question or dilemma that I had. I learned a lot from this experience, such as understanding community corrections, criminal justice system, and even the responsibilities of a probation officer. I came into this internship a little nervous because I was unsure of the responsibilities, as well as the aspect of working directly with offenders. I had



previous experience with the law enforcement side of the criminal justice system, and no experience with the corrections aspect. I gained very much confidence and knowledge during the semester and this definitely opened up possible career options for my future. I became more open-minded as I worked with these clients, and found myself wanting to do everything I could to help them successfully complete probation and encourage pro-social behavior to better their lives. It was rewarding to refer someone to help that they needed, and then watch them become happier and healthier.

Before this internship, I was unsure of exactly what I wanted to do after graduation. I knew that I loved psychology, criminal justice, and law, but I did not know how to pursue a career that combines all three. After completing this internship, I am seriously considering becoming a probation officer as an initial step towards my journey towards law school and federal law enforcement. It has a little bit of every aspect. I enjoyed being a part of the criminal justice system while also guiding troubled individuals towards crime-free lives and giving them the help that they may need in the process. At Harrisonburg Probation and Parole, I worked with some amazing individuals who confirmed my love for psychology and law, and made me feel like I was one of their own. I would recommend this experience to any Psychology or Criminal Justice student who would want to dive in to a productive, meaningful, eye-opening experience that not only helps the Harrisonburg community, but also helps the intern become a better-rounded individual.

Fall 2017 – Brandee Browning

The mission of District 39 Harrisonburg Probation and Parole is to promote public safety by providing offenders with the necessary resources in order to lead productive and crime-free lives. This is fostered through the supervision of offenders, providing information and resources pertaining to rehabilitation services, and assisting offenders that are struggling to reintegrate into society post incarceration. In addition to supervising offenders, District 39 also employs a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) for the benefit of the offenders. Offenders are referred to the LPC by their probation officer for brief therapy sessions and to perform mental health evaluations and suicide risk evaluations.

Over the course of my time as an intern at District 39 I was given the opportunity to perform many different tasks. At the beginning of the semester I spent all of my time shadowing probation officers and the District's LPC. I would sit in on interviews with offenders and then debrief with the probation officer or LPC after the meeting concluded. This allowed me to witness firsthand the sorts of interactions that took place when dealing with this population. I was also given a lot of case files to read through during my first few weeks at District 39. I found these case files to be quite interesting to read in addition to providing me with an opportunity to become familiar with the jargon used in the criminal justice field. Attending court is another experience that I was given numerous times throughout the semester. I have to admit I originally thought that sitting in court all day was going to be rather boring. However, attending court quickly became one of my favorite things to do at District 39. Not only was listening to all the cases really intriguing but it also made the time fly by as well.



One of my main responsibilities at District 39 was to log notes into the Virginia Coris system. Everything that a probation officer does regarding an offender must be logged into Coris in order to prove that it occurred. For example, if I were to meet with an offender in person or speak to them over the telephone I would be required to create a note detailing this event in Coris. I logged a lot of notes regarding Report-In Sheets, telephone contacts, and office contacts. Once the second half of the semester was underway I completed a lot more tasks on my own. I began to meet with offenders one-on-one, conduct urine screens, and do telephone contacts in order to schedule upcoming appointments.

Overall I would say that interning at District 39 has a lot of advantages to it. Everyone in the office went out of their way to answer any questions that I had and were willing to find tasks for me to complete when there wasn't much to do. I had a consistent schedule that I formed with my supervisors at the beginning of the semester regarding when I would be in the office. This proved to be helpful opposed to simply showing up whenever I had free time because my supervisors would schedule offenders to come into the office when they knew I was also going to be there. This showed me that the employees at District 39 wanted to see me learn as much as possible and ensured that I would be given multiple opportunities to meet with offenders which I appreciated. In addition to ensuring that I got plenty of face-to-face time with offenders during the second half of the semester, my supervisors took the time to get to know me as person so I never felt left out of the group. I never felt as if I were being treated as an intern per say and this made coming to District 39 an enjoyable experience every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

The only disadvantage to interning at District 39 was the unreliability of the offenders regarding showing up to appointments with the LPC. I am more interested in the mental health side of the criminal justice field so I was looking forward to sitting in on more of these meetings as the semester went on. While many offenders specifically asked for appointments with the LPC, they often failed to actually show up for the appointment. However, that is simply the reality of the field and there was nothing that District 39 could do about this issue. I was able to sit in on a few mental health evaluations at the beginning of the semester and I led one mental health meeting with an offender so I was still given opportunities to learn more about this side of things. I was able to visit the Diversion Center where I sat in on a treatment plan meeting as well as visit Strength in Peers in order to learn more about mental health. I would highly recommend anyone against scratching District 39 off of their list simply because of this, however. Anyone that wishes to work in the criminal justice field, even someone who is only interested in mental health, would gain an immense amount of valuable experience and knowledge from this site.

Before beginning my field placement at District 39 my career goals consisted of obtaining my Psy. D. degree in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Forensic Psychology. Now that my internship experience has concluded I still have these same career goals. I originally became interested in this site because I did not possess any experience working with offenders and I wanted to ensure that working with this population was the right fit for myself before applying to graduate school. In addition, I feel as if I have already gained skills needed to build rapport with this population by being able to meet with many offenders individually. Initially, I was only interested in working with offenders regarding competency to stand trial evaluations and insanity defense evaluations. While that remains my main career goal, I am also now interested in providing mental health counseling to offenders either at the doctorate or



master's degree level as well. I decided to apply to a few master level programs in clinical mental health counseling as a backup for the Psy. D. program due to learning more about the hardships that an offender faces when released from incarceration (either by his/her own hand or by society).

District 39 is the type of field placement site that suits individuals who are ready and eager to learn. I felt as if I was held to high standards and I strived to perform to the best of my ability. I was able to grow as a professional and gain skills related to both the criminal justice field and the mental health field due to the many tasks that I was allowed to complete on my own. All of my supervisors were more than willing to help out when I didn't understand something and went out of their way to provide me with new opportunities to learn and grow.

Megan Parker – Fall 2016

The District 39 Probation and Parole office, located in downtown Harrisonburg, is responsible for supervising the probations of over 1,000 offenders. The probation office aims to successfully reintegrate offenders into society, while assisting them through their probations. The mission of the probation office is “to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all”. This mission is fulfilled through the interactions probations have with the offenders on their caseload, as well as through interactions with other officers. Probation supervision is systematic and based on scientific methods to determine the level of supervision required for each person. This allows each offender to have a personalized probation that meets their individual needs. Probation officers also facilitate positive change in offenders by assisting them with whatever they may need, in any way they can. These needs can be help finding a job, finding effective therapy groups, or something as simple giving them food they may need from the food pantry. During my time at the probation office, I was able to see how caring the officers at District 39 truly are. While being a probation officer may be difficult and frustrating at times, the officers care about their offenders and want to see them live better, meaningful lives.

At District 39, I had many varying responsibilities. At the beginning of the semester, the tasks I was responsible for were small, but necessary. I would shred documents, file papers, attend Circuit Court, and assist my supervisor and other officers with whatever they needed. The beginning of the semester was slow, but this was expected. It is not possible to start working on tasks that the officers do without learning how to do them first. During the beginning of the semester, I spent some of my time learning how to “be a probation officer”. As the semester progressed, I took on greater responsibilities.

After learning how to navigate CORIS –the database used to handle all information about offenders and their probation –I began to research criminal histories and input them into CORIS, input COMPAS data (surveys used that ask questions about an offender's criminal history and current attitudes to determine what level of supervision they require) into CORIS, and log notes from meeting with offenders. One of my main responsibilities at the office was to meet with offenders. At first, I would sit in on meetings that my supervisor would have with probationers



on her caseload. This helped me to learn how to conduct meetings on my own. Eventually, I had one-on-one meetings with offenders on my own. This was one of my favorite things to do at the office because I had conversations offenders on my own and because I was entrusted with a great amount of responsibility. Another prominent aspect of my field placement was conducting drug screens. While this was not one of my favorite things to do, given the somewhat unsanitary nature of it (although I did wear gloves, so it was not actually unsanitary), it was necessary. All offenders on probation are required to maintain their sobriety and remain drug and alcohol-free throughout their probation; drug screens are used to make them accountable for their actions. Another task I had during my field placement was going on home visits with my supervisor. Probation officers conduct home visits to verify an offender's address, as well as to check up on them while they are home. While this may seem intrusive, home visits were short and offenders were warned ahead of time when their probation officer would be conducting a home visit.

During my time at the probation office, I not only learned about probation and the criminal justice system but I also learned a lot about myself as well. I learned that I can handle a lot more responsibility than I thought. Through my experience, I became more diverse because I interacted with people that were much different than myself. I truly loved this aspect of my field placement because I broadened my horizons and learned more about other people. My field placement helped me to burst my "JMU bubble" because I experienced Harrisonburg in a different light. As JMU students, we can sometimes forget that other people live in Harrisonburg, but my field placement was humbling because I was able to see how other people in our community live. My time at the probation office also helped me figure out my career goals. Before starting at District 39, I was unsure of what I wanted to do with my future, although I knew I was interested in law and psychology and wanted to combine my two passions into a career. During the semester, I realized that I want a career in which I can help other people, although I am still unsure of just what I want to do.

I am extremely grateful for my time at the District 39 Probation and Parole office. I cannot think of any disadvantages to my field placement; every aspect –the staff, my responsibilities, the offenders –was advantageous. The workplace was always a great environment to be in and the officers were always extremely kind and helpful. Even though I was much younger and less experienced than they are, they always made me feel as though I was equal to them and was always willing to help me if I ever needed it. I highly recommend a field placement at the District 39 Probation and Parole office for anyone that is interested in the law, the criminal justice system, or helping others.

Lauren Argenbright – Spring 2016

District 39 Probation and Parole supervises over 1,000 felony offenders who reside in the city of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and Page County. Their mission is "to facilitate a positive change in offender behavior, and to maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all." They fulfill this mission by comprehensively supervising individuals sentenced to probation in order to promote public safety and help offenders improve their lives. The



supervision of offenders involves meeting with them on a regular basis, both at the District 39 office and in their homes, conducting drug tests, and coordinating with substance abuse and mental health treatment providers.

During my time at District 39, I was able to assist with all of these activities. At the start of my field placement, I simply sat in on office meetings between probation officers and offenders, but as my skills and confidence grew, I conducted meetings with offenders independently. During these meetings we would discuss the offender's progress as well as any issues he or she was having. I also observed and collected urine samples for drug tests, accompanied probation officers on home visits all throughout Rockingham County, documented offender information in a state-wide community corrections database called CORIS, organized offender case files, and prepared for offender office visits. I also frequently got to observe Rockingham County Circuit Court proceedings. Probation officers must be present in court to open new cases for offenders sentenced to probation and they are often required to testify in cases involving offenders currently under supervision. Another extremely interesting task I completed while at District 39 was assisting with pre-sentencing reports. These are court-ordered reports in which the probation officers must compile the entire criminal, family, mental health, physical health, educational, and work history of a newly convicted offender. I was able to assist the officers in collecting and documenting all of this information, including the opportunity to sit in on in-depth interviews with the offenders.

I am incredibly grateful for my experience at District 39 and the opportunities it afforded me. Through completing and assisting with all these tasks, I believe I gained many valuable skills. I now have a much greater understanding of the community corrections system and the court system. I witnessed first-hand all the steps offenders go through when they enter the criminal justice system. One of the most rewarding aspects of this internship for me was getting to know the offenders and understand their lives and how they ended up in the situation they are currently in. Coming in to this experience at District 39, I was nervous about dealing with offenders and since I was more familiar with the policing rather than the probation side of law enforcement, I think I tended to define offenders by their crimes. However, through this experience, I have been able to challenge that bias and see offenders simply as the people they are, not as the crimes they have committed.

In addition to this increased open-mindedness, I have also gained confidence in my interpersonal skills through this experience. With the mentoring of my supervisors, Officer Burner and Officer Walston, I learned how to more effectively communicate with all kinds of people. As a more introverted person, these skills caused my confidence to grow a great deal and I now feel much more capable to lead an interview or take control of a situation than I did at the start of my field placement. These new found skills will likely be extremely beneficial to me in my future career as a police officer and thus, I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity my time at District 39 gave me to hone them.



Despite being a place for professional growth and development, District 39 was also just a fun place to be. I looked forward to every day I spent there because the staff is truly like a family. They were incredibly welcoming and they create a workplace culture that is very open and supportive. There were truly no disadvantages to this experience for me and the advantages are countless. I would absolutely rank my time at District 39 as one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences I have had while at JMU. If you have any interest in the criminal justice system, social work, forensic psychology, or simply helping people better their lives—as this is what probation officers strive to do each day—I highly recommend the field placement at District 39 Probation and Parole.

Francesca Castellano – Spring 2015

The official mission of District 39 is to “enhance public safety by controlling and supervising sentenced offenders in a humane, cost-efficient manner, consistent with sound correctional principles and constitutional standards.” Essentially, they protect the public’s safety through the rehabilitation of offenders in the area. They provide structured guidance as well as offer services in the community to help offenders deal with drug or alcohol abuse, emotional or behavioral issues amongst numerous other programs. In addition to supervising, Parole officers act as a pseudo-therapist by counseling offenders on any issues they may be dealing with.

A Parole officer has various responsibilities ranging from going on home visits to meeting with offenders in the office who just need to talk. As an intern, you will get experience with all of the jobs they have to do on a daily basis. There is no set schedule each day you report into District 39. After passing a background check, you are allowed the responsibilities of a typical Parole officer, which is very exciting. One of the primary jobs you are involved in is meeting with offenders. Meeting with them includes conducting drug screens of different types, ensuring offenders are going to work and paying off court costs, and taking notes about their progress then inputting the information into CORIS. CORIS is a program used by all law enforcement officers and acts as an online public file of each offender, which includes their medical history, convictions, family history as well as other general information. In addition to CORIS, organizing offender’s files in the office is extremely important in maintaining the most current information about the person, especially during case reviews or as the offender is approaching the end of their probationary period. Meetings with offenders are not only in the office, they are also conducted if the offender is in jail and is attempting to enter specific programs in the community such as Detention and Diversion or Gemeinschaft. Home visits are conducted either randomly or by appointment and their purpose is to ensure the offender is living at the residence they claim they are living at and to ensure there are no drugs or alcohol in the home as a regulation of their probation. Another responsibility is having to go to court to testify on behalf of offenders. Attending court is something that typically happens on a daily basis so you quickly become familiar with court proceedings and jargon. Lastly, if an offender is arrested while on probation, their Parole officer will go over to the jail and issue a warrant as well as get a drug screen.



Working for District 39 exposes you to many different aspects of the criminal justice system. Interacting with various law enforcement positions allows you to see into more than just a Parole officer's job, but other options in law enforcement. I did not know any jargon or legal terms when I first started working there, however after much exposure and practice, it becomes second nature and you can more easily relate to what others are saying. As an intern you will receive your own badge so the private information that the state has is available all the time. This requires practicing extreme maturity by maintaining people's privacy. By handling sensitive information on a daily basis, it feels like you are not just an intern but an integral part of the mission of District 39. You become a part of the offenders' lives as much as their actual Parole officers do which gives you a real life experience in the field. I also loved finally being able to use my counseling skills I've learned in the classroom, in the real world. I got to help people emotionally and they saw my opinion as a genuine option and not just advice from an inexperienced kid. The only limitation is that you can never plan ahead for a "regular day" because every day is different. Making schedules for the next day is basically impossible because one minute you're planning on organizing files and then the next minute you have to run to the jail to meet with an offender. As someone who thrives in high stress situations and loves variability, every day was exciting and fun. However, I can see how some people who value schedules and structure might feel on edge. More than anything, I loved the cohesiveness of the office and the emphasis on successful communication so that everyone has the most up to date information.

Throughout the semester, I've learned numerous important skills that are used within all law enforcement agencies. I've conducted countless amount of drugs screens, written many reports, and most importantly learned how to interact with offenders of all different personalities and crimes. There is no standard offender and no standard way to be a Parole officer, it's a job that you can make your own. I had no experience with legal jargon before working at District 39 and now I can use it without any hesitation. In addition to the experience with the legal system, I practiced how to be a part of an office and how to work under multiple bosses. I learned how to relate to people of different positions and how differentiate when its time to be serious and when its time to joke around.

At first, the job is a little intimidating because of all of the various aspects of it as well as getting thrown into the mix to learn. The best way to learn how to do something within the office is to be directly exposed to it and try it on your own. I've learned how to take initiative and have become more confident in my abilities and myself. Having responsibility has given me the experience needed to act as an adult and feel like I'm a part of the "real world". I would recommend this internship to anyone interested in the criminal justice field and psychology; I'm so lucky to have had this experience.

Allison Walker – Spring 2015



The mission of probation and parole programs is to enhance public safety by positively impacting offenders so they will lead pro-social and crime-free lives. As a part of the Virginia Department of Corrections, the probation and parole programs accomplish this mission through the reintegration of sentenced men and women in their custody and care by providing supervision and control, effective programs and re-entry services in safe environments which foster positive change and growth consistent with research-based evidence, fiscal responsibility, and constitutional standards. The Virginia Department of Corrections as a whole is also centered on seven core values that include safety, ethics, learning, commitment, support, respect, and honesty.

Probation officers supervise offenders through office contacts and community contacts, while offering a wide range of services in order to best reintegrate them back into the community and provides them with the resources to be productive and law-abiding citizens. Probation exhibits a perfect balance between law enforcement and counseling. They offer a variety of resources to assist in the offenders' reintegration, such as substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, community service opportunities to help with court costs, housing, etc.

I had an extensive amount of opportunities while interning at the Harrisonburg Probation and Parole office. On a daily basis, I collaborated with the Commonwealth's Attorney office and local law enforcement agencies. Also, I observed court proceedings related to initial sentencing and probation violations. My main task as an intern was to assist probation officers through effective supervision and management of caseloads, in which I would conduct interviews with the probationers in the office. During these office contacts, I would check an offender's progress with things such as job applications, housing, paying court costs, and any other issues they may have. In a majority of the office contacts I would also conduct urine screens. After each and every meeting I had with an offender, I would be required to log the activity using the Virginia Department of Corrections' computer system. I also had the chance to work the front desk where I would greet the probationers and check them in. Once they informed me of who they were here to see, it was my responsibility to notify the officer that they were here. Within this secretary position, I learned how to open new cases when they were sent to Probation and Parole from a prison, which also required sending letters to the offenders before they are released from prison to provide them with instructions of when to report to the Probation and Parole office upon their release. And lastly, I was able to attend the gang task force meetings on multiple occasions where officers from many different law enforcement agencies come together to collaborate and share information on the current gang population here in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.

At the beginning of my internship, I was specifically assigned to one of the two sex offender officers. I was able to assist her in the supervision of 32 sex offenders. However, as the semester went on, I was really grateful to be able to branch out and work with so many different



officers. During the second half of my time at the Probation and Parole office, I would bounce around from officer to officer, taking on any task or job they needed done. I really enjoyed this time of my internship because I was able to work with all types of offenders and I learned so much about the diversity of the offenders' lives and how each and every one of them has a different and unique background. This setup was very advantageous because I was exposed to many different processes and was able to learn how different officers handle different situations. I was very lucky in that I was consistently given the opportunity to practice what I had been learning all semester so by the end of the semester, I was completing tasks and handling case information on my own.

My absolute favorite part of my field placement at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole was the interaction with the offenders. I love to just listen to the offenders and hear about their progress. However, I most enjoyed going on home contacts with the officers because it was really helpful to see how the offenders and their families lived. After I began, I realized much easier it was to be unbiased towards the offenders than I had imagined it would be. However, the hardest part was to see offenders live in ways and let their offense rule their life in ways that would lead to neglect of their children. Also, there were times where it was more difficult to listen to the stories of the sex offenders, especially those involving very young children. Nonetheless, I was challenged in ways I had never been challenged before and I think it has helped me in my development of professionalism.

I am so appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of the field placement program and be able gain first-hand experience in a real work setting. I have learned so much during this past semester, both through my site experience but also through the classroom portion of this course. The main thing I learned at the Probation and Parole office is that if you plan to work with this type of population, especially when it may involve mental illness, it is imperative that you adopt a nonjudgmental and optimistic attitude. I have really enjoyed working with offenders and assisting them in the process of reintegration into the community, but it can definitely get frustrating at times. I have learned of the importance of leaving my opinion at the door when I go into the office because although these individuals have screwed up in some way or another, they all deserve a chance to change their lives around but that is not possible if we, as probation officers, do not believe in them.

Through the field placement program, and specifically my experience at my site, I have enormously expanded my knowledge of the criminal justice system. There is so much more to learn while being in an actual work setting compared to learning from textbooks in a classroom. I am so thankful to have had this opportunity to grow as an individual and professional. I have enhanced my communication skills, my attention to detail, my writing skills, as well as many other interpersonal skills. Overall, my experience at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole was amazing. I was able to familiarize myself with many aspects of the Virginia Department of



Corrections in hopes that I will continue working in this field in the future. My experience would not have been what it was without the encouraging and supportive staff of District 39 Probation and Parole.

Spring 2013 - Maura Flatley

The mission of Probation and Parole is to provide the best services and most effective programs to offenders while enhancing public safety. Probation officers supervise offenders, while offering a range of services in order to best reintegrate them into society. Probation seeks a balance between law enforcement and counseling and encourages prosocial behavior. They offer a variety of referrals, including substance abuse groups, sex offender groups, the CSB, housing, and many

I had a lot of different opportunities while interning at Probation and Parole. I went on home contacts, where we visited an offender's home and confirmed the address they provided by seeing their house, their bed, and their clothes. I went to the jail and completed Detention and Diversion evaluations of offenders in custody before sentencing. I observed and performed interviews at the probation office. These office contacts often consisted of completing COMPAS assessments, checking an offender's progress with things such as housing, job applications, and paying court costs and restitution. I conducted urine screens. Although many offenders must provide a urine screen, these are usually conducted on the offenders with histories of drug use.

I regularly used CORIS, the Department of Corrections computer system. I entered criminal histories, conducted and entered COMPAS assessments (assessing an offender's risk of reoffending), and entered various other types of data. I attended office meetings, including the mandatory bimonthly dialogue, which has a specific structure and topic to discuss. I was also able to attend a gang task force meeting and visit Gemeinschaft, an all-male group home for post-release individuals.

As a floater, my experience was different than most interns'. I was not assigned to a specific officer; instead, I would float around to different officers who needed my help or had something for me to do. The advantage of this approach was that I was able to work with many different officers and was exposed to a lot of different processes in Probation and Parole. The disadvantage was that, while I was exposed to a lot of things, I probably could have learned to do things more in-depth had I been assigned to one officer. I might have been able to become better acquainted with the more standard processes. There were a lot of things that I was shown once or twice, but was then not able to practice, so I was not able to complete it independently.



My favorite thing at probation was the interaction with the offenders, especially for home and office contacts. Home contacts are interesting because not only do you get out of the office, but you also get to see how people live. I experienced many different types of living situations. I also liked the counseling aspect of the office visits. I liked that Probation Officers (POs) get to be a condensed version of a life coach to help the offenders get their lives back on track. Another thing I like is that even though each PO has their own caseload, teamwork is still an important aspect of the job. The officers rely on each other for support in many different ways. My least favorite thing was filing; there is a lot of paperwork involved with this career. However, I have solidified my knowledge of the alphabet and realized that filing is an extremely important part of any job.

I learned so much while interning at Probation; however, one of the most important things I learned was that there is no such thing as a stereotypical probationer. An offender on probation can be anyone from a JMU student, to a substance abuser, to a middle-class mother of three. While I know that people of any demographic commit crimes, it was interesting to experience this firsthand. In addition, each probationer receives counseling to some degree, even if it is only through their meetings with their officer. I was surprised at how much I liked this aspect of probation and it has made me broaden my career search to include counseling.

Through this internship, I have greatly expanded my knowledge of the criminal justice system. Although I am a criminal justice minor, I learned so much by being directly immersed. I became acquainted with the courts, what classifies felonies and misdemeanors, how people get on probation, how probation works with other agencies, COMPAS assessments, the CSB, how to write reports, how to put files together, and more. I developed new skills including entering data in CORIS, administering urine screens, conducting interviews, entering notes, learning case management, conducting home visits, amongst many other things. I enhanced my writing skills through writing notes and letters; my attention to detail when searching for and entering data; and my interpersonal skills with both coworkers and offenders at meetings and home visits.

Overall, I had a really good experience interning at Probation and Parole. I was able to familiarize myself with many aspects of District 39 and the DOC. Everyone was always willing to help me and easy to talk to. Despite the fact that I learned a lot, there is still so much to learn. The criminal justice system is complex and requires a fairly vast knowledge of how it operates. This internship has both helped and confused me with my career choice because while I want to pursue something related to criminal justice, it has also opened my eyes to counseling. I look forward to using what I have learned at this internship as a basis for my career.