

STUDY AND REFLECTION GUIDE FOR UUA INTERNSHIP SUPERVISORS

*A publication of the Internship Clearinghouse, Ministerial Credentialing, UUA
Based on the supervisory training held in Portland, Oregon on June 18, 2007
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Introduction and Internship Nuts and Bolts – Patti Lawrence

- Searching for an intern
- Internship Clearinghouse
- Contracts/Letters of Agreement
- School Requirements/Process
- Ministerial Fellowship Committee expectations/requirements
- Learning/Serving Agreement
- Models of Supervision
- Intern Committees
- Evaluation/assessment

(Note: this information can be found in the UUA Internship Manual, available from the Internship Clearinghouse.)

A. The group brainstormed the skill areas that an intern may need to develop ...

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| • Good habits | • Identity | • Long range planning |
| • Small group ministry | • Public ministry | • Applied scholarship |
| • Self-care, play | • Pastoral skills | • Ministry of meetings |
| • Self awareness | • Preaching | • Time management – there will be too much to do |
| • Listening | • Dealing with stress | • Program development |
| • Support network | • Staff management | • Fiscal management |
| • Other awareness | • RE for adults and children | • Staff relationships |
| • Congregational systems | • Professional appearance | • Spiritual development – self and others |
| • Worship leading | • Fundraising | • Personal finance |
| • Vision | • Self-differentiation | • Feedback |
| • Activist organizing | • Empowering leadership | • Role definition |
| • Boundaries | • Conflict | • Supporting flow |
| • Collegiality | • Rites of passage | |
| • Coalition building | • Theological reflection | |

...and then talked as a group about how a supervisor can help to make that happen.

B. The group brainstormed on the question: What are some of the qualities, skills and roles that a good supervisor brings to an internship?

- Need to work with other sources as part of a longer process
- Need to assess our level of being prepared and our needs for growth
- Are primary teachers – about the congregation, and of reflection which leads to integration of experience
- Guide the intern, the learning experience
- Reflect on how we embody our own ideals
- Teach the tools of learning
- Sometimes have the intern shadow, sometimes have the intern work independently
- Show our mistakes and allow for questions and challenges
- Read – model and encourage ongoing learning
- Provide specific programs for a particular intern, depending on that intern’s needs
- Provide opportunities for the intern to be involved in weddings and funerals
- Make sure preaching and teaching opportunities on the congregational schedule, and that opportunities are created to fulfill other areas of ministry in the intern’s Learning/Serving Agreement
- Give the intern a preaching opportunity once a month, either as part of Sunday morning worship or as an alternative worship experience
- Give the intern liturgy feedback
- Observe other worship together and critique
- Make the intern point person on one committee
- Offer opportunities for pastoral relationships, home visits w/ shadowing
- Get the intern involved in an ongoing program such as Elder Journey
- Work with the intern on saying goodbye/departures, ministerial presence
- Make sure the intern has a chance to attend district meetings, ordinations, installations, interfaith groups
- If possible, help the intern find study support among other interns (if preparing to see the MFC)
- Help the intern understand their obligations to future interns – how much personal attention they give to others, for example
- Teach the intern the importance of graciousness and thankfulness
- Encourage the intern to continue their professional development – give them a membership to Alban Institute, one participant suggested

The Main Roles of the Supervisor in the Supervisory Session:

- Listener
- Prompter
- Questioner
- Colleague
- Encourager

C. Problem Solving: presentation of case study followed by group discussion. We then formed dyads for intern-supervisor role play. – Rev. David Sammons

There are all kinds of problems which interns might either be faced with or cause. Common ones are how to establish ministerial authority, especially when they don't feel they have it; setting boundaries when congregants latch onto an intern as a "special" person and demand inordinate time, inappropriate friendship, or taking sides, especially against you! There's a whole, and often unfamiliar, skill to be learned in terms of collegiality.

But sometimes the problem is created by interns themselves, and here's one from my own experience, disguised a bit, though one of the reasons I've chosen it is the person involved is not active in our ministry and I doubt if any of you would know who it is.

She came to me to apply for the internship at the last minute. The person we had chosen for the internship was forced, in mid-April, to withdraw because of personal issues that required him to drop out of school. So, I didn't have the luxury of evaluating this person v.v. someone else. Still, we had a good interview, the person overseeing internships at her school said the person was mature and would do well in a church like mine with a supervisor like me. The church was one that would have *died* if it didn't have an intern. It thought of itself as a "teaching church" and at a recent ordination held in its sanctuary one of the speakers boasted the church had had over 60 interns, though in the days before the MFC requirement I'm not sure it was fair to call them interns. Many were treated more like house pets, if I can make a gentle knock of my former congregation.

Things changed a lot after I came and the new MFC rules were set in place. I'd had several interns in the last two churches I served. Add them all up, and though not over 60, it is over 30, parish and community.

This intern is one of only two I failed, though the other one discerned the ministry wasn't his cup of tea before finishing the internship and went home to become the president of his congregation, which is what he really wanted to be.

Margie wanted to be a minister, all right, but of a church? That was another question. I don't mind taking interns who haven't made that discernment yet. Figuring out if the parish is the place to do an internship may be the most important thing for a particular intern to learn. My last intern in Walnut Creek learned she was really good at ministering in a congregational setting. She won the Borden prize for preaching, was good at helping people get organized, was great with kids and was an empathetic and helpful counselor – which is what led her to taking a position as the first chaplain ever hired by a Planned Parenthood affiliate in the West. I still hope one day she will turn to the parish as a place to do her ministry, but it would be Planned Parenthood patients' and staffs' loss if she did.

Margie's background could have taken her in a different direction. She was a writer who had spent most of her adult life as a newspaper reporter. Values, she said, particularly the support she found for her outspokenness in a UU church, is what led her to want to be a minister. She was married to a man who had MS and was just at that stage when he often needed to use a wheelchair. Margie was very supportive of her husband and had often spoken out while in seminary on issues dealing with disabilities. I had learned a lot from her about this, like how hard it would be for her husband to ever to come up on to our chancel to join her if, say, she asked him to light the chalice. So, we built a code-compliant ramp that could be brought out and used if someone in a chair wanted to come up to the chancel. We didn't use it often, even the husband preferred to use the steps the one time he was asked to light the chalice, but it was the right thing to do. In fact, we did an audit to make sure our church was fully compliant with ADA regulations, including a person to sign when a deaf person said she wanted to come to church but couldn't read lips at a distance. Later when a new sanctuary was built a lift was installed to handle getting up to the chancel and the total facility rated as accessible. I credit Margie for helping to provide us with the awareness necessary for that.

But the awareness wasn't as sharp on Margie's part. She seemed to regard the internship as something she had to do, rather than something from which she could learn. I had to push and push to get her to think about things during our internship sessions and she often just sat in her office and read. She hardly took any initiative to do anything unless I told her she should. So I tried to keep her busy doing things I thought she should do instead of what she thought would be helpful.

Margie had a couple of things going for her, though. She was a decent preacher and wrote what were usually interesting columns in our newsletter. Given her background, she should have been good at that. So, most people in the congregation liked her, including the members of her internship committee, especially its chair, a newcomer Margie had asked to join the committee. The committee was made up of three people appointed by the board from the congregation, for overlapping non-renewable three year terms, a liaison to the board and a person chosen by the intern, to be sure there was someone the intern knew he or she could trust. Margie made a good choice, from her point-of-view. Her choice was new to the congregation and just as outspoken as she had been as a reporter. Joe was a good guy, but Joe also like to champion things he thought were right, whether other people – including me – thought so, or not. And, because of various quirks, Joe, rather the committee chair, a rather introverted person, often took on the task of speaking for the committee.

Margie began what we had agreed would be a nine month internship in September and before you knew it Christmas and New Years had come and gone in a blink, as they often do. I was disappointed in what Margie had done – or, rather, had not done during the fall, but the ministry is an involving profession and I filled up my time with other things besides Margie. Then came “The Column.” A member of my congregation was on the board of the non-profit for which Margie's husband worked. It was a well-respected agency doing important work for marginalized people. But it needed to remodel its building to accommodate an expanded program and in doing so was told by the city from which it had to obtain a permit for the work that it would have to install a ramp to allow people in wheel chairs to enter its building without assistance. The building wasn't large and building the ramp was a challenge, because of constraints in space. But the architect came up with a design, the city signed off on it, and the ramp was built.

Unfortunately, the ramp didn't satisfy Margie's husband. Although he could get up it in his wheel chair without assistance, it didn't meet the guidelines set forth in a model ordinance suggested to cities by the Federal Government. It met code, but not those guidelines. So, Margie's husband, then Margie, made a cause of it – and not just with the agency or the city in which the agency's building was located – but with the church, which was in a completely different city. And the way Margie chose to make a cause of it was through her column in the church newsletter – and the target she chose for the attack wasn't the agency; it was the congregant who was a member of its board.

As a reporter, Margie knew that the way to draw people's attention to an issue was to personalize it, in this case by saying that the congregant on the agency's board should never have allowed the agency to disregard the needs of wheel-chair-bound people by building a ramp that was out of compliance with federal recommendations, even if it met city building codes. I've never been quite sure why Margie took this approach. In repeated conversations she said it was just because people needed to know this had happened and it was a violation of UU values, a violation which the member of a UU church should never have allowed to happen.

As I recall it, Margie actually said something of that kind in the column, but she said it in a way that was full of venom and vindication. So, as you can imagine, the congregant came to me angrier than I had ever seen the person become and demanded that I do something about it. I feel like telling you what went on after that, particularly what I did, but that would spoil the story. So, what I would like you to do is just put yourself in my place and talk about it, thinking about the case at all its levels: the level of roles: Margie's, mine, the internship committee, the board (as the offended person chose to raise it to that level), even the person at the school who had recommended the intern to me. What about values, what about ethics, what about boundaries and

guidelines, what about repercussions, what a supervisor can and should do? What tools, what leverage, what sanctions are available to you or to the person who was offended? What responsibilities does a school have for a person it recommends to you? What responsibility lies with the Office of Ministerial Credentialing at the UUA? Where do you turn for advice and counsel? What goes on after the incident is past? How do you deal with an internship evaluation of the person? I'll tell you that in real life the ripples of this incident carried on for a long time. In fact, only a year ago I had an e-mail exchange with Margie's husband, though I've never heard a thing from Margie herself as she moved on with her life, gaining notoriety in a far-off place for at least one more outrageous thing she did.

D. Theological Reflection: Experience, Reflection and Action – **Rev. Nan Hobart and Rev. Kim D. Wilson**

From a religious perspective, everything has a theological dimension. Theological reflection is the discipline of mindfulness of the meaning of every situation. Theology can be the hardest thing for UU ministers to talk about, yet reflecting theologically is an extremely important component of the supervisory sessions in an internship.

Ministerial students by necessity have been quite focused on themselves during their formation thus far. The theological reflection helps to get them out of their self-absorption. Not only is it essential for the student's continuing ministerial formation, it's a matter of being accountable to our religious tradition.

There are many different styles of "doing" theological reflection. Essentially, it consists of three parts: experience, reflection and action. To bridge the gap from experience to reflection, it's useful to have a device or method to help the intern detach from his or her singular perception of the incident and to enter into a reflective mode. In the reflective mode, there is a greater openness to new insights and religious understandings, as well as new ways of understanding each person's role in the situation (including the intern's).

Some supervisors will have the intern come to the supervisory session with a written description of the situation that will be a part of their reflection. They may give the student something in writing, something from one of the sources of our religious tradition, to offer the intern a counterpoint from which to begin the reflection. Using a question as a lens through which to view the experience is another way to engage in the reflective process. "Where is the sacred?" "Where do you find God in this situation?" "What do you believe? Does this reflection confirm or challenge your beliefs?"

After contemplating the situation through theological reflection, the supervisor helps the intern discover what he/she may have missed. (And, of course, the reality is that it's impossible to ever completely plumb the depths of a given situation, no matter how much reflection we do!)

Finally, the supervisor and intern move into an exploration of actions that might be taken as a result of the reflection. Some useful questions are: "What am I called to do in this context?" "What implications do these insights and understandings have on my future actions?" And, moving beyond the personal and the immediate, "Where am I called to be in the larger world?"

In the process of theological reflection, supervisors learn more about who they are as relational people. At its best, theological reflection is profound spiritual work for both intern and supervisor.

E. Methods of doing theological reflection – *Revs. Beth Banks, Jory Agate and David Sammons* each describe how they do theological reflection with their interns.

1. Beth:

During the internship the intern has a number of opportunities to complete projects that will give them concrete resources as they begin their ministry. Invariably completing these projects feels like a burden when there is so much coming at them, especially in the first six months. Once they are engaged in their first settlement I hear consistent feedback that they are grateful for the time they spent gathering resources for rites of passage. My interest in this process came from the panic I felt during the first few years of my settled ministry. Especially during the first year, I knew there was so much more to the process than the ceremony itself, but there seemed no time to get to the theology.

At the beginning of the internship the interns are required to do in-depth preparation for weddings, and each task in the process offers a spring-board for rich theological discussions. They're asked to do several things:

- Have one session with a certified marriage and family therapist to consider what questions are most helpful in pre-marriage counseling sessions. The interns are not usually therapists, but they should be aware of questions that might shine a light on problems that often surface after a few years of marriage. Is there a Unitarian Universalist message in our approach to relationships of commitment and issues of conflict?
- Pull together a packet of wedding ceremony resources. They are given all the resources at my disposal. They explore the deeper meaning of their selections for the packet. What does the selection that they have chosen to gather say about our denomination?
- Participate in at least one supervisory session reviewing plans for counseling sessions, as well as the written material for future couples. Will they sign marriage licenses for heterosexual couples or will they ask the couple to have a civil ceremony prior to the wedding? Where is the presence of Unitarian Universalism in their process and in their questions? How do they help the couple see this ceremony as a distinctly religious ceremony?
- The interns are offered all wedding requests from the community, and sometimes perform them for congregation members.

2. Jory:

I require a written theological reflection each week. I have them submit it a day or two before our supervisory meeting. We talk about how theology informs his or her actions, and based on that, what the intern did or wished he/she had done.

3. David:

I'd describe the way I do theological reflection as "situational," although I begin the year telling the intern that by the end of the year I not only want them to be able to explain their underlying theology to me in a way that makes sense to me, I want them to be able to put it in writing in a way that will make sense to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. It's tough—even my brightest interns are seldom used to theological thinking. Their theological thinking tends to be about the theology of Buber or Letty Russell or James Cone – or whoever they've been studying to fill in the theology page for the MFC. And even here, seldom have they thought of a Unitarian, Universalist or UU theologian – Channing or Emerson or Clarence Skinner or Henry Nelson Wieman

– who’s he? – though they may mention Sharon Welsh without even knowing she’s a UU, at least in her pre-Meadville days. It’s as though it’s enough to say “a loving God loves all of us,” as though this is all Ballou ever said. Or, “we can challenge this idea because it’s what’s reasonable and we don’t have to believe what someone else says.” And even those who think of themselves as being “spiritual” often have no idea what this has to do with making decisions. It has to do with feeling all right about themselves, ready to face the world, sometimes even inspired.

So, whenever there seems to me to be a theological dimension to something we’re talking about in a conversation with an intern I try to probe it. I try to get them away from just thinking about how to solve problems.

One of the most potent times to do this is in talking about sermons. You’ve all heard horrible first time sermons: “love me I’m lovable” sermons, “respect me,” “I’ve come through hard time” sermons, “I’m going to tell you everything and about the world” sermons, “look at me and what a virtuoso or creative person I am” sermons. Every once in awhile there’s one of those rare, “you’ve really touched me – really said something about my life that matters to me” – sermons.

Somewhere along the line the really good interns get to one of these and I cheer, even if it makes some of my sermons seem not so good. One of the things that makes these sermons come alive is they have theological content. They involve something that ultimately matters and people can see how what the intern is talking about comes from a deeply held theology that fits in a UU context, the kind of context in which the listener lives.

One of the things I dislike about some of the sermons I hear is I have absolutely no idea from what the intern is saying what she or he believes or how it fits in a UU context. Sometimes this is because it’s superficial and it doesn’t go very deep. Sometimes it’s because the intern really doesn’t know what he or she believes, at least theologically.

So, the conversation goes on and I try to show how my theology shines through what I say and how it’s UU – and biblical, and reasonable, and how it relates to salvation. I ask them to reflect on what words I use over and over again in a sermon, and what words they use. I ask them if they can hear anything about the divine in what I say or in what I do - in what they say or do. I ask if they can tell from my sermons or theirs the basis for what is right and wrong, false or true – where “Oughts” come from, if there are any of them. I ask if they have any sense of who, for me, are models of religious behavior – and why. What about them? Is Martin Luther King, Jr., a good model because he disliked racism and violence or because he was a Christian and believed in God? One who could read Theodore Parker and Channing, but not be a Unitarian. I ask, in the end, what is their story of salvation, what is the UU one, and how will it save us and the world? Questions like this get beyond whether there is or isn’t such a thing as global warming – or whether or not the intelligent thing to do is do something about it, as a book I’ve just read suggests. And it goes beyond, “Paul Tillich would say,” or even “as the Hebrew prophets suggest,” though they do.

Finally, I say, “I can sum up my theology in a few words and here it is....” I don’t mean to suggest theologizing is as simple as this. I’ve read hundreds of books about theology over the years and know how complex it is. But I need them to know that I have a theological orientation that is central to everything I say and do, one by which I judge my own life. And I don’t want it to be a mystery. I don’t ask that those who hear me accept my theology. But I do want them to know where I’m coming from, why it’s religious, and how I apply my beliefs to my life – because with whatever their theology is I want them to believe it’s adequate enough for them to do the same thing. And, if it’s not, they’ve got to go deeper and do the work so that it is. The same goes for interns. Theological “lite” isn’t enough, not even in a UU church or some other kind of setting.

F. Theological Reflection Role Plays

What follows are two different scenarios, both ripe for theological reflection. After hearing the first scenario, the group divided into groups of four. One person played the role of supervisor and another, the role of intern. The other two listened while the “actors” role played an abbreviated supervisory session based on the scenario. All four then discussed the supervisory session and the issues that came up. After hearing the second scenario, the listeners become supervisor and intern and the others listen. Readers might consider trying either or both role plays with one or more colleagues.

Role Play One: “Thelma and the CUUPS Service” By Rev. Jory Agate

Student Reflection

Background information: I began my internship at First Parish three weeks ago. I have finished two years at Seminary U. Having grown up in a small lay led fellowship, I am unused to such a large vibrant congregation like First Parish. Many individuals are approaching wanting my involvement and I am struggling to figure out where I fit in and what programs I should be assisting in and in what role.

Experience: The other Sunday during social hour Thelma approached me and asked if I would assist her in leading the Fall Equinox worship service with her. She said that this is a traditional fall service held on an evening in the local part and she would love to have some ministerial assistance with it. I asked her who else would be working on it and she said herself and CUUPS group. I said I would be happy to assist and asked her when the next planning meeting would be. She said we could get together to plan it on Tuesday evening.

I met her on Tuesday to discuss the worship and was surprised to see that no one else came. She said she had lots of other people involved who were doing different parts but they could not meet with me now. She told me all the parts she wanted me to do which felt like most of the liturgy. I wasn't clear what exactly others were doing but she said she had it all planned out.

On Sunday I asked around after church to see who was coming to the equinox service that afternoon. No one said they could make it and several confided in me that they found Thelma impossible to work with and therefore while they were involved in CUUPS they would have nothing to do with anything that Thelma was leading.

The equinox service was held that Sunday afternoon, but there were only a few people present, mostly newcomers and folks who obviously didn't know Thelma that well.

I thought the service was fine, and I did my parts, but it was obvious to me how controlling Thelma can be and why others might have avoided it. Thelma was very upset that the turn out was so low and was very critical to me that folks in the community just “don't care” and don't show up for things they say they value.

Response: As Unitarian Universalists we value the worth of every individual. What should a minister do when individuals in the congregations “shun” one of the members? I can understand why people have a hard time with Thelma's leadership, but I also understand Thelma's frustration when people say they will come and do things and then don't. If I am to minister to all of these individuals then how do I help Thelma not be so controlling and others to make a true commitment?

I believe that a church community needs to covenant to journey with one another and provide support and encouragement as each travels their spiritual path. How do I help them make this covenant to each other and actually be supportive and work together? I feel inept to this challenge.

Role Play Two: “The Wedding”
By Rev. Beth Banks

A.: Intern Scenario

You have received a call from a couple who live just outside the town of Savid where you are serving as an intern, and they have heard that you will do weddings for people who aren't members of the church. They attended the church twice, and decided that they like the church building and the grounds. They are curious about the theology because it is very different from their own. They normally attend Holy Glory Evangelical Christian church in the next town, but because this couple is supportive of those who are homosexual, the minister has refused to perform their marriage ceremony. The couple's families will be attending, and the parents are aligned with the minister of Holy Glory on marriage. The couple definitely wants to have their personal relationship with Jesus reflected in the ceremony and they are concerned with the comfort level of their parents.

They are coming to your office this evening, and luckily you have a supervisory session planned a few hours before their appointment.

What are the questions you will ask them during their first session? This is the issue that you're bringing to the supervisory session.

B.: Supervisor Scenario

You are the UU settled minister in a town of Sivad where Unitarian Universalism is frequently misunderstood. One of the reasons there is misunderstanding is that the church members explain the beliefs at interfaith gatherings in dramatically different ways. Some members speak of the religion as humanist with no belief in a transcendent presence. Others speak openly of Unitarian Universalism as a deeply spiritual faith, and they offer up prayers at the weekly the vigils against the war. Thus, the community wonders, “What does it mean to be Unitarian Universalist?”

The intern has received a call from a couple who usually attend Holy Glory Evangelical Christian church. They disagree with the pastor on an important issue, and he has refused to do their wedding. The new intern will be meeting the couple this evening, and what luck! You have a supervisory meeting this afternoon.

The intern is considering what questions will be appropriate for this first session. Given that there is no shared understanding of Unitarian Universalism in the County around the town of Sivad, it is likely that the couple won't know much about UUism. How will you guide the intern as the intern helps the couple discern whether this is the right church for their ceremony? When working with a couple whose religious perspective is different from the intern's, how does the intern maintain a sense of theological integrity? How much should the worship service be used as a way to overtly experience Unitarian Universalism?

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