

Social work interns



Did you know that Clark College collaborates with universities in our region to host interns to assist our students while gaining valuable real-world experience? Dean of Student Engagement Cath Busha organized the internship program five years ago and has been supervising interns ever since.

This academic year, Clark is hosting three social work interns with Busha providing their social work supervision. The interns fulfill their university practicum requirement by completing 12 hours per week at Clark. Their internships are nine months and span the academic year.

Busha works with Portland State University's School of Social Work and other local universities to build internship opportunities with students working toward either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree in social work or working toward a graduate certificate in Student Affairs in Higher Education.

Busha said the result is a win-win for everyone: “The students earn credits and gain real-world experience. Clark benefits from what the interns bring to the table.”

Busha added, “The interns are in school, so they bring us cutting-edge learning and ensure best practices. They build connections with our students and external partners. We learn as much from the interns as they learn from us. Clark is a great place for the social work students to immerse themselves in their field of study.”

During the 2022-23 academic year, Busha supervised two PSU interns. Alexis Washram focused on the Penguin Pantry. Cassandra Walsh worked in the office of Student Care and Conduct and worked as part of the CARE team. Both interns were graduate students in Portland State University’s School of Social Work.

Christi Williams, Associate Director of Student Care, Conduct and Complaints at Clark College, works closely with Busha and the interns. Her connections with Clark are many. First, she graduated from Clark. Second, when she was earning her master’s degree in social work at PSU, she was a Clark intern during the 2021-22 academic year and worked with Busha. After she graduated, she was hired in her current permanent position.

Williams said her internship at Clark provided a “safe environment to learn and make mistakes. I was encouraged to ask questions and learned about how not only my department runs, but how Student Affairs collaborates to ensure student success. I learned about code of conduct, community standards, and supporting the needs of our students. During my internship, I improved my skills in communication and active listening.”

Williams has come full circle. This academic year, she is providing task supervision to interns Kepler Smith and Maria

George.

Meet Clark's 2023 Social Work Interns

This academic year Busha is supervising three social work students who are completing their internships at Clark College.



Maria George (she/her) is studying social work and psychology at the University of Portland. She is completing her practicum at Clark as an intern in the Department of Care, Conduct, and Complaints.

When a faculty member refers a student for a code of conduct violation, George and her supervisor reach out to the student and ask them to schedule a meeting to discuss their options. During the 2022-23 academic year, their office mitigated 108

alleged violations. The most common were cheating and plagiarism.

George said, “In my internship at Clark, I get to take the theories and framework I’m learning in class at University of Portland and then apply that knowledge in real situations. We’re trying to understand where students are coming from and help them be successful.”



Kepler Smith (they/them) is a fulltime student at Portland State University who is pursuing a master’s degree in social work and has a passion for service. They completed their Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology at the University of Oregon in 2021.

Busha said, “With an interest in serving queer and disabled communities, Kepler hopes that their combined personal and professional experience will make them an effective and approachable partner for a wide range of people.”

In their internship, Smith reaches out to students who may be struggling and helps connect them with resources. In short, it's about recognizing a student's needs and finding resources through Clark or the service district to meet that need. For example, a professor notices a student has stopped coming to class or a student tells a faculty member they are at risk of living in their car.

Smith said, "Sometimes Clark doesn't have the tools to meet these needs. However, Clark is well connected with Vancouver, and it's all about community."

Smith and Williams recently met with local resources including Lifeline Connections and the Recovery Navigator program via Recovery Café to learn about available resources.

Smith said, "There's crossover between houselessness and recovery. It's an encouraging feeling to connect people with what they need."



Jill Forgash (she/her) has worked at Clark as a student success coach since January 2022. She also is in her second year of a master's in social work program at PSU pursuing a goal of becoming a licensed clinical social worker/therapist. Forgash was able to stay in her success coach role and work with Busha to complete her employed social work internship at Clark as part of her PSU program.

Forgash explained how her work at Clark complements her classes at PSU: "My role as a success coach includes elements of macro and micro social work. I connect students to resources and help them develop tools to be successful in college."

She works full time at Clark and is taking 8 credits at PSU. In her classes she has been learning the names of the skills

she already has been doing in her work as a success coach.

“In class, we’ve been practicing skills like reflective listening and motivational interviewing—things I’m already doing as a success coach,” Forgash said. “It’s a good feeling to have a confluence of your work and what you’re learning.”

Q & A with former intern Gabriela “Ella” Santoyo Gutierrez

Gabriela “Ella” Santoyo Gutierrez was earning a master’s degree in social work at PSU when she was a social work intern at Clark working in the Student CARE, Conduct and Complaints for the Office of Vice President of Student Affairs. During her internship she helped coordinate, plan, and manage student conduct and care cases concerning students’ mental health and well-being, behavioral intervention, and academic dishonesty. She also attended and participated in national and local DEI training.

Q: How did your internship at Clark prepare you for your career in social work?

GSG: My internship at Clark helped me learn what it means to center trauma-informed practices in intervention, prevention, and wellness meetings while holding direct conversations with students. Attending DEI conferences and training were also so helpful in expanding my equity acumen and learning to tailor training to reach different audiences.

Q: After you completed your Clark internship, what other work did you do while you were still a student at PSU?

GSG: Last academic year I worked part time as an equity and civil rights coordinator for the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Q: When did you graduate from PSU? Where are you working now?

GSG: After graduating from PSU spring term 2023, I was hired in a full-time role as an equity and inclusion coordinator for the City of Milwaukie, Oregon.

Q: What would you consider your dream job? What are your career goals?

GSG: This new position in Milwaukie is my dream job. I hope to gain more experience in working on community engagement and workforce development to hopefully become a director of DEI at a nonprofit or state level.

Q: What is your advice to students considering an internship opportunity at Clark College?

GSG: Be clear about what skills they want to work on, their communication styles and feedback preferences. I also highly recommend getting involved at Clark and community events whenever possible. Specifically, Clark's office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) offers monthly B.U.I.L.D. and PPI training, but there are also opportunities to join committees (curriculum, budget, Caring Campus, etc.). Build as many networks at Clark as you can—and enjoy the bakery!

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish