

Write as much as you want (at least 500 words) about how you're feeling about the practicum experience. Consider the following prompts: Do you look forward to coming to work at your practicum site? Why/why not? Does the work you're doing resonate with your own values? How so/not? How is this experience informing your career trajectory.

As I spend more time on this practicum, I feel more sense of belonging and motivation for this work. First of all, I thought this work just needs basic analytical skills by conducting data analysis and running basic models, and I could easily handle it. However, after exploring more, I found that running models, if not the least important, are not as important as I thought. The only requirements to run models are patience and caution since it takes plenty of time and can easily make mistakes. From my perspective, the processes before and after data analysis are more important and interesting. Before running models, I need to look through variables, understand their meanings, select variables based on theories and experience, and research suitable methods. This process is the same as writing a research paper, which needs to read literature, quantify theoretical concepts, and justify reasonable methods. The difference is that institutional research relies more on experiences, and does not require reading that many papers, justifying authors' arguments, and forming my own opinions. I feel this might be one drawback of this job. Although this job is vital for supporting institutions to make the decision, the evidence it provides do not as solid and valid as research.

Moreover, it has more internal data that cannot be obtained in the public database due to FERPA. With those data, I can explore theories that I read before. My supervisor's experience and knowledge also provided me with more ideas on student success. Although my research interests mainly focus on higher education finance and

policy, I am also interested in student success. The dataset includes student characteristics, backgrounds, as well as financial support, etc. Thus, it is a valuable opportunity for me to explore how financial support impacts student success. Furthermore, my research results could make changes directly because those results will be reported to the vice presidents.

As a practicum student, I have plenty of flexibility and time to learn and try new things. Ohio University has not developed a mature method and process to analyze student retention. That is to say, I can discuss my supervisor with the best methods based on my understanding. He also respects my thoughts. It is a learning process. I have been working through the basic concepts of the multivariate probit model which I have not heard of before, the combination of an advanced method – Markov chain Monte Carlo and multivariate probit model, selections among various packages to analysis, and solutions to coding and theoretical issues. We have discussed a lot during this process and sought external suggestions. Even though this model does not work in the end, I learned some new concepts, new methods, and new packages. For several weeks, I was looping in meeting problems, seeking solutions, and meeting other problems. It is frustrating when meeting problems, but it is also happy and exciting when solving problems.

The flexibility this job provides also requires me to be self-disciplined. My supervisor treats me as an employee and asks me to conduct this project independently. At first, I was not used to that, however, as time goes by, I feel comfortable keeping my pace and being more confident in discussing. Such a working style is the one I value. I tried a nine-to-five routine but ended up burning out and bored. For this job, as long as I finish analyzing and reporting my results, I could have my own time.

The next step is to visualize those results and report to vice presidents and stakeholders. Although I do not experience it, from my supervisor's words, I feel that is one of the most important parts of this job. We need to present results and suggestions in a way that is easy to understand by outsiders. It would be a big challenge for me to develop my communication skills.

This practicum challenges me a lot, but also provides a valuable chance to work through the whole process, develop essential skills, and think about my career choice.