

International Practicum for Social Work students – undergrad and graduate - in Sighisoara, Romania.



An international practicum is not for everyone.

If you would like to expand your horizons, immerse yourself in another culture, test your flexibility and tolerance for the unknown, understand better your own cultural biases, learn from Christian social workers who have grown up in a very different environment, learn what it feels like to be in the minority, grapple with issues of discrimination and social exclusion, learn to communicate in another language, depend on God in new ways, then maybe a semester overseas is something you should consider.

If you have interest in working abroad, or with immigrants or diverse populations in the US, or simply in gaining a broader understanding of what it means to be a global Christian; if you

are compassionate, and curious, and eager to learn and to serve, then you could be a good fit for the Romanian Studies Program.

The RSP has been hosting American social work students since 1993. It provides the structure, support and supervision that you need to fulfil your practicum requirements, while allowing you to apply your knowledge, experience and talents to make a difference in the lives of children, teenagers, persons with special needs, or elderly.

Setting: Located in the charming historic town of Sighisoara in the Transylvania region of Romania, the RSP was founded in 1993 as a response to the social, spiritual and material needs of the country after the fall of communism. The program has brought over 500 Christian students to Romania to learn through cross-cultural immersion and service to needy people in the name of Christ. Half of them have been social work majors, more than 80 have done their senior practicum, and 7 more have done a Masters-level practicum. Even after 25+ years of democracy and capitalism, there is still a great deal of poverty, discrimination and marginalization in Romania, a great deal of need.



Agency: The impact of so many students working in the community of Sighisoara has been tremendous. They began by working alongside Romanian Christians who served as helpers and translators. Needs were detected in the community, and there were no services to refer people to, and so



one by one programs were started. In 2001 Veritas was established, a multi-service agency that now has 22 Romanian employees and is the largest non-profit agency in a town of 32,000 people.

Veritas is a Christian agency which is intentionally ecumenical. Services include holistic support to poor children and families (mostly Roma, i.e. gypsy), to the elderly, to adults and adolescents with special needs, and to victims of domestic violence. Over 300 people per week benefit from services.

Students doing a social work practicum with the RSP do so in the context of Veritas.

What is it like to do a practicum? Students gain experience in leading group activities in the different programs, and also develop relationships with individual clients, go on home visits, do assessments and work with

Romanian staff on planning and carrying out interventions. Each student has a macro experience such as community research, grant writing or helping to develop a new program.

Students are of course somewhat limited by the language barrier, even though they take Romanian classes and learn how to work with a translator. They become very adept at using and reading non-verbal communication. They have rich opportunity to expand their understanding of diversity, oppression and discrimination, and to apply social work values and ethics within the context of international frameworks. The cross-cultural setting often provokes serious reflection on how professional identity relates to Christian faith.

Master's level students bring a depth of experience and skill that allows them to carry greater responsibilities. They may contribute to Veritas staff training, or design and carry out a community assessment or help improve some area of agency policy or administration.

Supervision: Within Veritas students work closely with Romanian staff who have degrees in social work and at least five years of practice experience. They provide background information on clients, take students on home visits, help them understand agency policies and learn about community resources, involve them in planning, give assignments and provide feedback on their work. Individual weekly supervision is provided by RSP staff who have an MSW and can help students social work theories and principles they have learned in their coursework back home to this new cultural setting.

Social Work Seminar: There are often several social work seniors at a time doing a practicum with Veritas. A weekly seminar class helps students process as a group issues that come up in their practicum, and allows for presentations on topics related to international social work.





Cross-cultural immersion: Students live with Romanian host families. Some choose to have an American room-mate, others prefer to be on their own with a family. They participate as much as possible in the life of the family. They take 35 hours of Romanian language classes, in order to be able to communicate at a basic conversational level with clients, host families and others. They also read about Romanian history, watch films and presentations about various aspects of Romanian culture, and go on expeditions to places of

historical and cultural interest. They participate in a bi-lingual church, which originally grew out of the friendships American students made with Romanians, and are encouraged to make Romanian friends. As a group they are given extensive cross-cultural orientation, weekly debriefing sessions and preparation for re-entry to their own culture.

Additional coursework: Students doing less than the full 400 hour practicum may add credits in Romanian Language, literature, history, environmental science, or even hiking in the Carpathian mountains.

How do you apply? Students in the RSP continue to be enrolled in their own universities and colleges which give credit for the experience. You can come for fall semester, or spring semester. You pay your own university what you would normally pay for a semester or summer on campus – tuition, room and board – and then the RSP bills the university. In addition you need to buy a round-trip ticket to Romania, which costs between \$800 and \$1,200. Applications can be downloaded from the RSP website: www.RomanianStudiesProgram.org. The RSP director will contact your school's social work department to make sure of their approval.

Participating schools: In the last six years students from the following schools have done their senior practicum through the RSP: Asbury, Cedarville, Cornerstone, Eastern Nazarene, Hope, Kuyper, Malone, Mount Vernon Nazarene, Northwest Nazarene, Olivet Nazarene and the U of Illinois. Graduate students from Pittsburgh State, Dominican, and U of Indiana have done a master's practicum.

For more information please consult www.RomanianStudiesProgram.org and www.Veritas.ro, or direct your questions to romanianstudiesprogram@gmail.com

