Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

What is CPE?

“Clinical Pastoral Education is interfaith professional education for ministry. It brings theological students and ministers of all faiths (pastors, priests, rabbis, imams and others) into supervised encounter with persons in crisis. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs of those to whom they minister. From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry. Within the interdisciplinary team process of helping persons, they develop skills in interpersonal and interprofessional relationships” (from the CPE website www.acpe.edu).

Overview

Successful completion of a basic unit of CPE is recognized by a growing number of Jesuit provinces, religious orders, dioceses, and lay ministry organizations as a criterion for ordination, final profession, and/or certification for lay ministry. CPE is a prerequisite for admission to a growing number of long-term internship programs in spiritual direction and retreat ministry. The Association of Professional Chaplains requires four units of CPE for those pursuing chaplaincy certification. CPE’s focus on intensive ministry to those in great vulnerability and intentional reflection on one’s pastoral work makes it excellent formation for ANY sort of ministry, not simply for work in healthcare. For these reasons, all M.Div. students are urged to consider completing a basic unit of CPE for their professional ministry practicum. In particular, lay students should note the professional significance given to CPE as an essential credential for lay ministry.

Academic Credit

The M.Div. Professional Ministry Practicum at the STM requires a total of six credits. By completing a CPE unit, a student is able to earn five credits. The one remaining credit needed to fulfill the M.Div. practicum requirement is earned through participation in one reflection session (TM690, CPE Reflection Experience) with the Faculty Director of Professional Ministry Practica and through submission of the “Theology of Ministry Essay” and the “Student Evaluation of CPE Site” at the conclusion of the CPE experience.
Students who complete a unit of CPE as their Professional Ministry Practicum are exempt from the required practicum course on campus, although they may choose to participate in it.

**CPE Schedule**

A basic unit of CPE may be completed in an intense full-time summer schedule of approximately eleven weeks. An extended unit requires approximately sixteen hours per week, for twenty-five weeks done over the course of the academic year. Some settings also offer an extended weekend program for completing a unit of CPE.

Students interested in CPE should consult the national ACPE website (www.acpe.edu) to investigate possible sites and review the common application. For a summer unit, application deadlines are often as early as the prior November or December. For an academic year unit, application deadlines are often the prior February or March. Students apply directly to the CPE programs in which they are interested.

**Application Form**

A copy of the common application and all other CPE forms may be found at the following location: (http://s531162813.onlinehome.us/forms/). The common application is used by all CPE sites. It needs to be filled out only once. Send your application to as many CPE sites as you wish, although applying to three or four sites is reasonable. CPE sites will contact you directly if they wish to interview you. Apply early if looking in Boston. There are many students from the schools of the Boston Theological Institute who also look for CPE placements, so available spaces fill up quickly. Be aware of deadlines of the sites you are interested in. The site you choose must be ACPE accredited.

*Academic, denominational and personal references are required as part of the CPE application. The academic reference should be from a person familiar with your academic work. This may be someone from the STM but could also be someone with whom you have done academic work in another setting, including undergraduate work. The denominational reference should be from someone who knows you as a person of faith. (If you are pursuing ordination in a particular denomination, the reference should typically be from someone of that denominational system.) The personal reference should be from someone who knows your character and knows you as a person of integrity. The CPE sites may contact the references you provide directly or may ask you to secure the reference letters.*
Interviews

*When interviewing with potential CPE sites, it is essential to keep in mind that you are interviewing the site as much as you are being interviewed by the site.* A positive CPE experience is often related to the ‘fit’ a student feels with his/her supervisor and the setting. Therefore, be sure to interview at the site in person if at all possible. If not possible, investigate Skype as an option. It is important to see the site and meet the person who will be supervising you. Ask questions regarding this person’s style of supervision, the method of leading group work, and how the supervisor thinks about the purpose of peer groups. Listen to your instincts. With which supervisor(s) do you feel you can learn well?

Costs

The approximate cost for one unit of CPE (five credits) is $750-$1,000, which is paid directly to the CPE site. Financial responsibility for the CPE unit lies completely with the student, as no scholarships are available from the STM. (N.B. No tuition is paid to the STM for these five credits, since they are transferred in from the CPE site.) The cost for the additional one credit (CPE Reflection Experience [TM690], Theology of Ministry Essay and Student Evaluation of CPE Site) is paid to the STM.

STM Forms

All STM forms related to CPE are located on the STM website.

Prior Units of CPE

Some students have completed CPE prior to enrolling at the STM. This prior experience may be used to fulfill the Professional Ministry Practicum requirement of the M.Div. degree if the completed CPE unit meets two criteria. First, the CPE unit must have been completed within three years of enrolling at the STM. Second, credit from the CPE unit cannot have been used to meet requirements for a previous degree program.

In order to have the CPE credit transferred to your degree at the STM, obtain a letter from your CPE supervisor that attests to the completion of a full CPE unit and includes beginning and ending dates of your work at the site. The letter must be printed on official site letterhead and mailed to the following address:
Confirm with Ellen Romer that five credits have been transferred in from the CPE site.

To receive the additional one credit of Professional Ministry Practicum required by the M.Div. degree, see Dr. Melissa Kelley about participating in TM690 (CPE Reflection Experience) and completion of the Theology of Ministry Essay and Student Evaluation of CPE Site.

Next Steps

Students are encouraged to consider CPE as an excellent means of fulfilling their M.Div. Professional Ministry Practicum. **If you hope to complete CPE in summer, you will need to submit applications the prior fall.** It is essential to learn and observe the relevant application deadlines for the sites you are pursuing.