

Initial Supervisor Conversation Talking Points
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This document is meant to be a support for students who might not know how to begin a conversation with a potential site supervisor or an STH faculty member about their Contextual Education ideas.

FIRST – IDENTIFY A POTENTIAL SUPERVISOR

- If you are pursuing a **site placement internship**, this person should be a leader who works at that site and who would serve as your on-site supervisor. The Contextual Education Office maintains a list of sites that have registered as site partners with the School of Theology, and these are an excellent place to begin when searching for a potential placement site. Please see the Contextual Education website for the most up-to-date site partner listings.
- If you are pursuing a **Contextual Education project**, this person should be an STH faculty member.

SECOND – MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TALK WITH THAT SUPERVISOR EITHER IN-PERSON, OVER THE PHONE, OR ON ZOOM

- The Contextual Education supervisory process is deeply relational. You'll meet regularly one-on-one with your supervisor throughout the semester(s) of your ConEd experience, talking through theological concepts as well as reviewing and evaluating your work. For this reason, it's important to interact "live" with your potential supervisor beforehand to see if there is a good fit between you personally.
- While you may be tempted to work out all the details of your placement or project by email, to avoid having an in-person conversation, this will not serve you or your supervisor well in the long-run. Far better to notice any interpersonal issues ahead of time, while you can still choose another site/project supervisor, rather than starting up with someone and then realizing they are not a good fit.

THIRD – PREPARE SOME TALKING POINTS BEFORE THAT INITIAL CONVERSATION

- You will want to go into the first conversation with your potential supervisor having already figured out a few things for yourself. This will take some research and preparation ahead of that conversation.
 - **If you're considering a site placement internship**, you should go to the website of your potential supervisor's organization to learn a bit more about it. Determine what excites you most about learning in that environment and what questions or concerns you might have after reviewing the website.
 - You can say to a potential supervisor, for example, "I would really like the opportunity to explore public theology in my site placement, but I didn't see anything on your website about community outreach. Could you tell me if there's any opportunity for community outreach and organization through your site?" Remember that you're trying to determine if the things you want to learn can be achieved at the supervisor's site.
 - **If you're considering a Contextual Education project**, you will want to have thought through the details of your project ahead of time. Your potential project supervisor, as an STH faculty member, will want to hear the overall learning goal of your project – what aspects of religious leadership do you most want to learn by doing this project, and what are some tasks you plan to undertake to achieve that learning? Don't come to this first conversation without at least a basic outline of your project plan, though it can be a rough draft.

- You would say to your potential project supervisor something like, “I’m planning to do a project focused on helping communities of faith deepen their commitments to environmental justice. I want to interview a few congregational leaders about what they are already doing to see what kinds of resources are out there, then take that learning and pair it with what I’ve been studying in class to create a seminar or curriculum that I could offer congregations in the future.” Even this small outline provides the faculty member an overview of your project, so they can determine whether it’s something they can supervise.

FOURTH – YOU AND YOUR POTENTIAL SUPERVISOR TALK THROUGH THE DETAILS

- Your potential supervisor will likely have questions for you, such as, “Why are you interested in this site/project?” and, “Tell me a little about your background and where you see yourself going vocationally in the future?” Answering personal and vocational questions gives your potential supervisor more context as to why you’re considering this site or project topic.
- **If you are pursuing a placement internship**, you need to ask your potential supervisor about whether the internship at their site would be paid or unpaid. Contextual Education internships are typically unpaid, but some sites can provide financial support for their interns in one of two forms:
 - Some sites can pay their interns directly as hourly employees of the organization (often at the rate of minimum wage per hour).
 - The sites who cannot compensate their interns by paying an hourly wage can still financially support their student by directing scholarship funds directly to the student’s BU account. We ask that sites that can afford to do so consider giving between \$1500 - \$2500 per semester in scholarship support to their student intern.
 - Sites that cannot afford to either compensate or provide scholarship support to their interns can still be wonderful sites of learning. You’ll just want to clarify your financial expectations with your potential supervisor as part of this initial conversation so you both can decide whether this site is a good fit for you.
 - **Please note: if you are pursuing a Contextual Education project** you do not need to talk with your potential project supervisor about compensation or scholarship support. Because the project takes the form of a directed study class rather than an internship, it is ineligible for financial compensation.
- Once you’ve answered all your potential supervisor’s questions you can spend time talking with them about the details of your site placement or project. For example, you may want to ask when would a good time of the week be for one-on-one supervisory meetings with them? Would they want those meetings to happen in-person or over Zoom? What kinds of readings or resources could they imagine helping you with this placement or project? Work with them to consider any further details you’d like to work out ahead of time.

FIFTH – CONFIRM THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SERVE AS YOUR SUPERVISOR

- By the end of the conversation, you will have talked with your potential supervisor through the details of your placement or project, and you will have a feel as to whether this person will make a good supervisor for you. If you feel good about them supervising you, you need to ask them specifically to affirm their interest and availability to be your supervisor. You can say something like, “So, would you be willing to serve as my supervisor for my Contextual Education during the _____ semester(s)?”

- Hopefully they will say “yes” without hesitation! If so, great! Now you are ready to complete your Contextual Education paperwork with them identified as your supervisor.
- If they say “no,” then you need to move on to a different placement site or ask a different STH faculty member to serve as your project supervisor. Don’t worry – sometimes students need to ask a few sites or faculty members before finding the right “fit!”
- If you have any trouble identifying a new site for a placement or potential STH faculty member for your project, come talk with the Contextual Education Office Directors, who can help you. Make an appointment by emailing sthope@bu.edu.