

**CONTEXTUAL
EDUCATION
OFFICE**

**SUPERVISOR
HANDBOOK**

2025-2026



School of Theology

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IN THIS THINKING TOGETHER WE BEGIN TO SEE what we had not seen before: we belong to each other, we belong together. Belonging must become the hermeneutic starting point from which we think the social, the political, the individual, the ecclesial, and most crucial for this work, the educational.... Theological education must capture its central work--to form us in the art of cultivating belonging.

Dr. Willie James Jennings
After Whiteness: A Theological Education in Belonging

WELCOME TO CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION

We're so grateful you're joining us.

We in the Contextual Education Office extend so much gratitude to the many supervisors who choose to invite our students into their professional spaces. Whether you are a practicing minister trained in theology or an organizational leader with expert knowledge in your field, you serve as an invaluable resource to our students pursuing field-based education. Without leaders like yourself in the field who are committed to student learning, student growth, and vocational discernment, our program would be a fraction of what it is today.

This upcoming year we hope that you will engage in a profound and meaningful supervisory relationship while cultivating an emerging site of learning. As students dive deep within the world of texts and scholarly debate in some of their most engaging courses at the School of Theology, you and your communities will allow them to bring their most pressing questions and curiosities to life. Through conversation, reflection, leadership, and relationship, we look forward to what this partnership will surely yield!

WHAT I APPRECIATE MOST ABOUT CONTEXTUAL ED is that it was required for me. I think it has been a great way to bring my classroom learning into a setting that has implications for me and those I work with. And I think that has been the growth most of all: translating work from the classroom into work within a congregation.

Quote from Contextual Education Student

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION"?

where theology meets practice

At the School of Theology our curriculum strives always to move beyond the classroom and into our students' communities of concern. While they may be driven by rigorous and thought-provoking questions that emerge in the classroom, our program helps direct these future theological leaders into the very places where those inquiries can take on new life, be formed and reformed by the communities in which they serve, and ultimately become the foundation for a long and healthy

professional life. We believe all theology is contextual. Integral to this premise is helping students foster relationships with active communities, congregations, and organizations. Through our program, students don't simply test theories in "the field" but rather are immersed in an active process of formation by virtue of engaging real-world people, environments, and concerns.

I KNOW THE SKILLS I LEARNED IN MY CONTEXTUAL ED will be important for whatever direction my vocation takes. When I think of my vocation, I still think about creating dialogue and educational spaces that might challenge and replace harmful colonial narratives that continue to cause injustice against those marginalized in our society, particularly those narratives that have theological connections. I learned so much about the importance of encounter, creating spaces of respect and listening, that I believe are important for any work in challenging harm and injustice and creating better futures where all people are honored.

Quote from Contextual Education Student

SUPERVISOR EXPECTATIONS

WEEK-TO-WEEK 01.

All supervisors are expected to meet with their intern for **one-on-one supervisory conversation** one day per week. These conversations should consider the student's learning goals as outlined in their Learning Agreement, discuss areas of growth and achievement, and explore areas for deeper theological reflection. Within these meetings, students will be asked to share with you their **theological reflection papers** written during their contextual education class time.

CHECK-INS, TRAININGS, AND CEUS 02.

We provide supervisors six opportunities throughout the course of the year to connect with one another. These check-ins offer a chance to speak directly with the ConEd directors at BU, share best practices for supporting students, and to reconsider approaches to supervision in light of challenges that may arise at your site.

Supervisors who wish to gain deeper insight into their own supervisory practice may use this time to attend our Supervisor Trainings. These sessions cover a wide-range of topics from trauma-informed mentoring to intercultural competency. You may choose to attend all of these sessions and receive one continuing education unit (1 CEU) or simply come as you wish.* **All first-time supervisors are required to attend our Supervisor Trainings.**

*In order to become a certified supervisor or to receive one CEU, you must complete a total of 10 minimum training hours over one school year.



STUDENT EVALUATIONS 03.

Supervisors are asked to complete evaluative reports of their students at the end of each semester. These reports are held in perpetuity by the Office of Contextual Education. **The more texture, nuance, and specificity a supervisor offers in any given evaluation, the better use this evaluation is to both the student and our office.**

These evaluations ultimately factor into students' overall Contextual Education grades and their Mid-Degree Program Assessments. Additionally, **ordaining and certifying bodies can request these evaluations from our office at any point in the future** should a student pursue particular credentialing post-graduation.

ADDITIONAL EXPECTATIONS

PROVIDE AN ORIENTATION

Be sure to provide a thorough orientation of the site to your student, including **making the appropriate introductions for them**. Who are the other employees, volunteers, members, and stakeholders they need to know in order to successfully be in a position of leadership at your site?

A **robust orientation** at the start of a student's internship can help offset the number of hours spent getting acclimated to the site.

CONFIRM SCHOLARSHIP INFO

The School of Theology asks that sites contribute a small scholarship for each student interning at their site. The minimum amount for this academic year is **\$1,500 per semester**. This modest amount will help defer some of the expenses a student may incur amid their internship. We recognize that these scholarships may be a stretch or unworkable for some sites. In those cases, we will not deter the student from interning at your site. For more information about contributing to your student's scholarship, see **page 10**.

IDENTIFY STUDENT NEEDS

Provide your student with any appropriate **identification materials** or **site infrastructure required** to do their work well. Does your student need access to certain keys or building codes? Do you expect them to use an organization-based email? Is there a designated workspace they might expect to inhabit each week?

Please provide clarity around these needs in the **first week** of your student's placement.

OBSERVE LEADERSHIP

As a supervisor, you should be keenly aware of your student's leadership ability. **Observe and provide constructive feedback** about their skills and talents. Make suggestions where you see room for growth, and provide positive feedback for anything well-done. You should be able to bear witness to the majority of your student's central tasks and responsibilities.

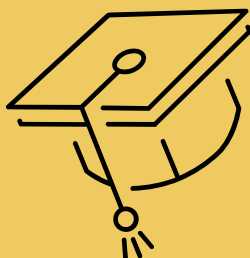
UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING AGREEMENT

The Learning Agreement is the central document that binds the work of your site, the student's unique vocational goals, and the aims of Contextual Education at Boston University School of Theology all into one. Together you and your student will use this document to form expectations around work, responsibilities, central learning goals, hours, and the tasks associated with your student's primary role at your site.

This Learning Agreement relates directly to the student's **degree program** as the contextual learning they engage in at your site will relate directly to their plan of study. For instance, a student in our Ecclesial Ministry track will be encouraged to preach or provide pastoral care as part of their learning while a student in our Open track focused on religion and the academy might be encouraged to incorporate teaching and research in your context as a way of better understanding their vocational goals.

As the supervisor of a robust site of learning, you likely already have a wide variety of tasks in mind for your student to engage as part of their contextual education. The Learning Agreement encourages you to first inquire about the student's personal and vocational goals, their theological questions and concerns, and to form a learning experience based on a collaborative vision that suits both the needs of the student as well as the needs of your organization.

Contextual Education is
Field Education and not
Field **Work**...



The Learning Agreement helps underscore the central purpose of the program: **for the student to learn, not to accomplish particular tasks for a site**. Success is determined by what a student learns regarding their vocational identity, vocational call, ability to reflect theologically, and gaining of professional skills for ministry and leadership. As part of this learning, **supervisors guide students through self-reflection**, as opposed to traditional processes of telling them "what they should know."



COMPONENTS OF THE LEARNING AGREEMENT

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

Each student is asked to frame their Learning Agreement in terms of their overall **learning goal**. The learning goal should highlight the student's personal, professional, and vocational desires, their growing edges, and what they ultimately hope to gain from their experience interning at your site.

A well-articulated learning goal will guide your student toward the tasks at your site most closely aligned with their needs.

REQUIRED INTERNSHIP HOURS

In order to receive course credit for their internship, students must complete a minimum number of hours at your site. Typically, **a student pursuing a Fall/Spring placement is required to provide on-site leadership of approximately 15 hours/week** (185 hours/semester).*

The remaining 5 hours/week account for the student's ConEd class time, leadership prep-work, sabbath keeping/self-care, travel time, and weekly supervisory one-on-ones.

*Students in 6-Credit Summer placements must double their on-site hours to 30 hours/week (370 hours/semester)

TASKS & OBJECTIVES

Students are asked to outline specific **learning objectives** related to work they hope to accomplish at your site. Learning objectives should help a student move toward their overall goal.

Under each objective, you and your student will determine specific **tasks** to meet that objective. For instance, if the Learning Objective is to gain deeper insight into community organizing, one task might be to staff a table at a particular event.

AGREEMENT RENEGOTIATIONS

Learning Agreements can be renegotiated mid-year if the student and supervisor determine that the learning goals or tasks may need to shift for any reason. **Renegotiations should be determined during your weekly one-on-ones.** Students should contact their Contextual Education Instructor (a.k.a., their ITP Leader) with changes to initiate the approval process.

INTERNSHIP COMMITTEES

DO I NEED AN INTERNSHIP COMMITTEE?

Internship Committees typically consist of 3 or 4 trusted members of your organization and exist to support, uplift, and encourage the student at your site. **These committees are not a requirement of our program**, but are recommended particularly for our ecclesial placements looking to enrich their sites of learning. Internship Committees often serve as a liaison between the organization and the student, helping them to better transition into their role.

COMMITTEE EXPECTATIONS

While the supervisor directs the student's central tasks and responsibilities, the Internship Committee may serve as an additional resource as they carry out these tasks. As such, **Internship Committees are highly contextualized**. In church contexts, for instance, where a student might be focused on preaching, an Internship Committee might commit to meeting with the student for sermon feedback. Likewise, at other organizations this committee may set 3-4 meetings with a student throughout the course of the year to **offer feedback** on their leadership development, engage in collaborative reflection on the site, and answer student questions.

The exact details of an IC's involvement should be outlined in the Learning Agreement.



SITE LIASONS

Internship Committees serve as site liaisons. Whether your student is at your site for a single semester or an entire academic year, **the Internship Committee can provide an invaluable host of welcome, translating the culture of the site to the student in record time**. Many choose to offer hospitality to their interns during their first week, organize rideshares to and from the site, and can also provide feedback for how the congregation is receiving the student's leadership. They also make themselves welcome to the student as a resource within the community when additional support may be needed.

We recommend that your Internship Committee offer a **welcome event** for your student to introduce them to your organization!

SCHOLARSHIPS & COMPENSATION

We believe students deserve to pursue graduate-level internships without breaking the bank

OUR SCHOLARSHIP PROCESS

Students at the School of Theology are eligible to receive \$1,000 per semester of first-level Contextual Education. This small scholarship awarded by the school offsets the cost of travel to and from their site and provides a bit of assistance toward any other expenses they may incur as a result of their internship (such as childcare, meals, books, etc).

CONTEXTUAL ED INTERNS WHO ARE PAID STAFF AT YOUR SITE

Students who are paid staff at your site are not eligible for a Contextual Education Scholarship. We consider any student making state minimum wage "paid staff."

SITE CONTRIBUTION

We ask our site partners to commit to financially honoring the time and talents of their student with an additional scholarship for the student.

Our sites typically contribute anywhere between \$1,500 and \$2,500 toward their student's scholarship each semester.

At the beginning of the first semester with your student, our office will reach out to you to ask if you intend to provide compensation to the student in any way, either through employment or by providing a scholarship.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR STUDENT'S SCHOLARSHIP

At the start of each semester, write a check payable to BU School of Theology with your student's name in the memo line and mail this to:

BU School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Suite 107
Boston, MA 02115

Once processed, these funds will be posted to your student's account.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the School of Theology will not deter sites of learning from participating in our program due to financial burden, we know the hardship students bear by taking on unpaid internships. Therefore, we ask our partners to try to grow their internship budget over time.

FAQS

How can I become a Certified Contextual Education Supervisor through Boston University School of Theology?

Supervisors who attend all six (at least 10 hours) of our Supervisor Trainings throughout the course of the school year qualify for certification through the School of Theology. Our certified supervisors are most likely to receive a Contextual Education student on a given year. Our office also may invite certified supervisors to provide "off-site" supervision to students in placements where additional one-on-one support is needed.

What should I do if a conflict arises with a student at my site?

The Office of Contextual Education will always be your main point of contact should any issues relating to your student or your overall experience of our program arise. For minor issues and concerns, we recommend attending our supervisor check-ins where we will solicit student concerns. For pressing matters, we strongly encourage you to reach out to our office directly by email to make an appointment with one of the directors (sthope@bu.edu).

What should I do if I am no longer able to supervise my student after the semester has already begun or if I plan to take a leave of absence?

Students are required to have an on-site supervisor for the duration of their placement. If there is another trusted leader in your organization who you believe can fulfill your supervisory role, you may propose this new supervisor in your absence (to be approved by both the ConEd Office and your student). If no such person exists, the Office will provide an off-site supervisor for your student and asks that another trusted member of your organization be appointed as the primary contact to delegate tasks and responsibilities for your student.

My student is not following through with their tasks as assigned and/or I cannot get a hold of them at all. What should I do?

This is a rare occurrence, but one that should be addressed sooner rather than later. Our office depends largely on supervisors' evaluative feedback at the end of the semester to gauge student involvement at their site. If a student is largely absent or disengaged, this can be a sign that early intervention is needed. We strongly recommend reaching out to our office if you suspect your student may require additional support.

My student is a staff member in addition to a Contextual Education Intern. How do I best navigate this?

For students on staff at the organizations in which they are pursuing their Contextual Education, we understand that the nature of their work may involve tasks and responsibilities not associated with their degree program. We ask that you and your student make clear which tasks meet the learning goals and basic hour requirements outlined in their Learning Agreement. In many cases, we recommend your student adopt a unique additional project or initiative for the program year.

I have not formally studied theology/I do not feel comfortable providing theological supervision for my student. Can I still be their supervisor?

Yes! The bulk of theological supervision typically occurs during students' weekly one-on-ones. For students at sites without a theological supervisor, we appoint one for them to meet off-site. You and your student can still discern the cadence and tenor of your own one-on-ones.

We've just finished a successful year with a Contextual Ed student, but we haven't been offered a new one yet. Have we done something wrong?

We love you! There are myriad factors that go into site selection processes each year. The particular student body, the number of students enrolled in Contextual Education in a given year, the shifting nature of theological education, and the vocational goals of students (just to name a few). Students self-select their placements based off of personal, financial, theological, and denominational interests.

How can I increase my organization's chances of receiving a Contextual Education student next year?

We begin the process for initiating Fall placements as early as February. If you and your organization are particularly interested in taking on another Contextual Education student, we highly recommend reaching out to our office in the Spring as this is the time when students are meeting with us to discuss, discern, and finalize their placements for the following year.

MEET THE TEAM



ANASTASIA KIDD

Director

Anna is beginning her fourth year in the ConEd Office but has served roles at the School of Theology for over two decades. As Director, Anna is most concerned with shaping a holistic formational experience for students preparing for today's complex religious leadership. She is herself bi-vocational, serving a church part-time alongside her administrative, teaching, & research work at the School.



NIKKI RENÉE

Assistant Director

Nikki begins her fourth year in the ConEd office. Her work includes managing the day-to-day, meeting 1:1 with students for vocational discernment and site placements, and developing enriching resources for supervisors and community leaders. Nikki is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church.



LEO ROBERTS

Senior Program Coordinator

Leo begins his third year in the ConEd Office. He manages most of our site and supervisor correspondences. In addition to coordinating student and supervisor centered events, Leo provides administrative support, suite hospitality, and student care.



CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION

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