

Chronicles of a clinical psychology internship applicant - Part I: Things I wish I had known earlier

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Internship is something that is at the back of the clinical psychology student's mind from the very first day of graduate school. We hear about the illustrious "match day" from more senior students and although we don't fully understand what it entails, we are well aware that for many students it is the day when "their fate is determined".

As junior graduate students in clinical psychology we also hear numerous anecdotal stories from our seniors, such as their terrible experiences in trying to recall hours they'd accrued five years earlier, or more catastrophic stories such as failure to get the perfect letter of recommendation because that professor has since passed away. Year after year, I have watched my more senior colleagues going through the same ordeals, though I never quite understood the specifics of the process until just recently when I encountered my own set of internship application mishaps. This article is designed both for potential applicants in next year's internship pool, and also for first-year students who will not be contemplating internship for several years to come. Unlike other internship articles you may have read or will read, this one is intended to share with you some specific information on the internship process based on my own experiences. This article is the first of three in a series that is designed to (1) prepare you for the internship application process, (2) take you through the interview

and match phases, and (3) provide a posthoc perspective when internship is complete.

THINGS TO CONSIDER FROM VERY EARLY ON IN YOUR GRADUATE CAREER

1. Recording your clinical hours

All clinical students are told from the very first day of our clinical endeavors to keep good records of our training. I, like many others, believed I was being very thorough in keeping a log of the number of hours, the general type of client seen, and the type of therapy modality employed. I had faithfully done so for my first few years of clinical work and felt as though my record keeping would prevent me from going through what other students, who had not diligently recorded their clinical hours, went through at the time of internship applications. These basics of record keeping are critical; however, there are a number of more specific types of information that must be tracked from your initial clinical experience right through to your first day on internship. It is possible to download the APPIC application (otherwise known as the AAPI) and use this detailed information to guide your record keeping. I personally did download the AAPI but found it not only confusing and daunting in my early years as a graduate student, but also difficult to locate the precise information that I needed to log my hours. For those of you who

would prefer a “nuts and bolts” approach that does not require the AAPI, here is the information that you should record. You can create your own type of personalized database or diary book in which to record this information. These should be recorded separately for Masters and Doctoral work if your Masters degree did not lead to your PhD.

Intervention & assessment hours:

- Total hours and number of different clients directly seen, including their ages, in individual therapy vs. career counselling vs. group therapy vs. family therapy vs. couples therapy vs. school counseling vs. miscellaneous experiences not fitting into one of these categories
- Number of hours spent doing psychodiagnostic test administration (eg., personality inventories, objective and projective tests, intelligence tests, etc.) and doing neuropsychological test administration. It is critical to keep a complete list of each type of test you administered (this also includes standardized self-report tests such as the Beck Depression Inventory and structured interviews such as the SCID-IV). You should note how many times you administered each of these tests to a real client in a clinical setting vs. a mock administration to a classmate for educational purposes. Additionally, how many integrated reports have you written based on these assessment tools (keep separate for adults and children)?
- Did you ever supervise another student in assessment or therapy?
- Were you ever involved in program development or outreach planning?
- Did you conduct outcome assessments of programs/projects?
- Were you involved in systems intervention?

Support activities

- Carefully record your supervision hours. You should tally separately the number of hours spent in one-on-one supervision, group supervision, and peer supervision or consultation.

Treatment settings

- Record the specific settings in which each of your assessment and treatment experiences have taken place (ie., child guidance clinic, community mental health center, university psychology clinic, forensic setting, inpatient or outpatient hospital, military, schools, counselling center, etc.).

Other information

- Have you led or co-led groups? Keep specific details.
- Record the ethnicity of each client you have seen
- Record the sexual orientation of each client you have seen. Note that in some circumstances this may be difficult information to obtain. Do the best you can to collect this information if possible.
- Record specific disabilities of each of your clients. For example, is there a physical/orthopedic disability? Are they blind or deaf? Do they have a learning or cognitive disability? Developmental disability? Serious mental illness?
- Note the number of women vs. men seen

Teaching experience

- Record any experience with teaching (this includes being a teaching assistant) that you have accrued. Were you ever asked to do a guest lecture?

Other clinical experiences

- In addition to training you've accrued through formal practica, you may have other clinical experience. For example, you can list any clinical experience you have obtained prior to graduate school, clinical assessments you are conducting as part of your dissertation, volunteer activities, etc. It is very important that you discuss with your director of clinical training to determine which of your experiences are considered "program sanctioned" and which are "extra hours"
- Also record the number of hours spent on writing reports, reviewing the case, reading the literature relevant to your clinical work, and attending grand rounds, case conferences, or other didactic seminars relating to your case.

Overall, accounting for every last hour is not critical to your AAPI, but careful record keeping from an early stage can certainly circumvent the problem of either feigning hours or underestimating how many you truly did accrue.

2. Letter of recommendation

Most internship sites require that you submit three letters of recommendation with your application; however, the range is two - four letters. There are three very important points to make about letters of recommendation. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that most, if not all, graduate students have a wealth of clinical experience, excellent research projects, and other activities that provide them with breadth and perspective. To this end, different applicants can appear quite comparable. Letters of recommendation can differentiate applicants because of "extra" information included, often relating to interpersonal style, ability to be a team member, etc. A strong letter of recommendation is critical, but a luke-warm letter can do far more harm than good. Keep

this in mind when selecting your letter writers. Secondly, many sites require that letters come from registered clinical psychologists, and may discourage those from psychiatrists, physicians, or masters level professionals. This is an important issue today, especially given that students are gaining valuable training in multidisciplinary settings and may be supervised by other, non-psychologist professionals. Despite the value in gaining broad experiences with multidisciplinary teams, it is important that a licensed clinical psychologist be involved in your training. Ensure that you have received supervision from at least 3 different clinical psychologists in addition to your work with other health professionals. Finally, some students choose to apply for internship at the same sites in which they have gained most of their clinical experiences in graduate school. In such cases, the clinical psychologists who had supervised your training may be the very people on the internship admissions committee, and to avoid conflict of interest, they may decline to write you a letter of recommendation. A student may not realize this until it is too late, and as such, may be forced to postpone internship applications for another year while they accrue more clinical hours in a different setting. My advice here would be to try to accumulate your letters of recommendation from different settings. If you think that you may want to apply for an internship at a site where you are currently gaining experience, you may wish to clarify with your letter-writer where they stand on this issue. Your research supervisor can also provide a letter of recommendation, even if that person has not supervised your clinical work, or if you are not seeking a research focused internship. Often it is your research supervisor who can comment best on your leadership, writing, and teaching skills. Overall, keep potential reference letter

writers in mind from your very first clinical experience. You may wish to ask your first year practicum supervisor to write you a letter of recommendation immediately after your practicum has ended, and ask this person to file this letter for future use.

THINGS TO CONSIDER ONE YEAR BEFORE COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATIONS

1. Website addresses and e-mails to bookmark

The most important website that you will be frequently using throughout the application process is www.appic.org. Students may wish to familiarize themselves with this website well before the application process. There are various listserves available to students through this website. Matchnews is a list-serve that all internship candidates must register for and it contains valuable up-to-date information about the APPIC matching program. I subscribed to matchnews one year before I went through the application process myself so that I had some early familiarity with the procedures. While this is not critical, I personally found it very helpful to read early on about how the match system operates, and what the clearinghouse is. I also strongly recommend becoming a member of Intern-network, an unmoderated list-serve available to current applicants, current interns, and directors of clinical training. This list-serve was especially helpful in clarifying numerous questions relating to the application form (e.g., should I double or single-space my essays?). You may choose to register for Intern-network far in advance of the time you will be applying as it could be helpful in avoiding surprises. One year before your applications are due you may wish to keep an eye open for upcoming workshops and conventions focused on internship. For

example, I attended the APA Graduate Student (APAGS) convention on internship at this year's APA in San Francisco. I found this intensive workshop incredibly helpful in providing step-by-step suggestions for how to approach internship applications and interviews. APAGS in general provides very helpful information on internship, and publish an internship workbook every year with sample APIs, cover letters, thank you letters, and interview tips. Their website is: www.apa.org/apags/. Other conferences, such as the Association for the Advancement of Behaviour Therapy, also provide internship workshops and seminars. There was something very reassuring about hearing the questions of other students that paralleled my own concerns. Another very useful website, by Dr. Donna Pincus and Dr. John Otis, is www.psychzone.com. This site contains a list of potential interview questions that applicants may want to prepare several months beforehand.

2. Sample assessment report

Several internship sites require that the applicant submit a sample integrated report that they have written. While some students may opt for creating a mock sample report, this may require a considerable amount of time and unnecessary energy. It is recommended, instead, to obtain a copy of a report you had written, and remove all identifying information before attaching it to your application. It is very important that you obtain the proper permission from a supervisor before using a previously written report as this report is not the property of the student. In some cases, the setting in which the report was written may require that the student contact the client to obtain approval, even though identifying information will be removed. My personal advice here is this: if you have written a "good" integrated report and think that you might want to use it one

day in your internship applications, obtain permission from the client at the time. Then print out an extra copy of the report replacing all identifying information, such as names of people, cities, hospital record numbers, addresses, etc., with X's. Then, file this report approval, information personal you integrated might you obtain the extra all as hospital etc., report in a safe location for future use. Even if you do not end up using that report, you may potentially save yourself from unnecessary hassle at the time of internship applications.

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Citizenship requirements

Most students will use the APPIC on-line directory to access potential internship sites of interest. It is possible to use specific keywords and exclusionary criteria to obtain a shortlist of sites that you may be interested in. In addition to this, you may wish to speak to leaders in your field, or other more senior students whom you admire, in order to determine what sites may be of interest. As a caution, you may wish to include in your short-list programs that are currently not CPA or APA approved. A site may be currently undergoing the process of accreditation at the time you are completing your applications. My recommendation here is to contact each site to inquire about accreditation status, and not to rely solely on the APPIC directory for such information. It is also critical to consult with your department's requirements for accreditation. Additionally, several American sites list on the APPIC directory that they do not accept Canadian students. There was one particular site in New Jersey that I was extremely interested in, but after reading on the APPIC directory that this site accepts only American citizens, I removed them from my

wish-list. It was only after discussing this issue with the training director from that site at a recent conference that I learned that they often do take Canadian citizens, despite what the APPIC directory lists. My advice here is if there is a site you are very interested in, but you think you may not be eligible, contact the training director for that internship site directly. It would be unfortunate to learn of a potential experience well after the application due date.

2. APPIC vs CCPPP

The Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Center (AAPIC) will be your major source of information about the internship match process and sites. All students completing a predoctoral internship in clinical psychology will be required to use the match program to secure an internship position. However, there are additional Canadian internship sites, belonging to the Canadian Council of Professional Psychology Programs (CCPPP), which are not located in the APPIC directory. A complete listing of these sites can be found at www.usask.ca/psychology/ccppp. This site also contains valuable information on internship interviewing and hours documentation tips. It is important to note that there are several APA and/or CPA accredited internship sites that are not located in the APPIC directory but which are located at the CCPPP website.

By no means have I provided an exhaustive list of all of the important things to consider early on in the internship process. I have included bits of information based on my own experience. I strongly encourage students to talk to more senior students, both pre- and postinternship. Encourage your training director to hold internship information meetings in which students at

every stage can voice their concerns and experiences. I found the experience of internship application preparation parallel to my experience with comprehensive exams. In the months before there is a vague sense of anticipatory panic about how much work needs to get done. The actual process can seem overwhelming for many students, and may generate negative feelings about the necessity of doing such tedious and time-consuming work. However, once the process

is complete, you become filled with a wonderful feeling of accomplishment for having integrated so much information over so many years of graduate work and compiled it into a single written exam (in the case of comps) or into an APPIC application (in the case of internship applications). It is my hope that this information will be useful to you and help to make the application process an enjoyable one.