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Selecting a School Psychology Internship: Tips for Graduate Students

In school psychology training programs, a year-long internship provides a culminating experience and ultimately the opportunity to integrate numerous aspects of your education. Many consider this to be the most important part of training in school psychology. An internship enables you to practice and integrate skills with support from field-based supervisors and university program faculty. In addition to the professional experience they provide, internships are required for school psychology certification and licensure from national and state credentialing agencies.

The process for acquiring an internship varies by program and state. Some programs, for example, have designated internship sites where students are regularly placed. Others work individually with students to acquire an internship. And in other programs, guidance is provided on how to apply for internships but the application process is left to students. Before you begin your search for an internship, check with your program director or faculty to familiarize yourself with program internship requirements and application processes. Your internship must be approved by your graduate program.

Internships also differ from school district to school district and even from supervisor to supervisor. They offer varying degrees of hands-on experience, opportunities to practice and/or refine an area of interest, pathways to permanent positions, networking opportunities, and compensation. If the process in your training program involves having students apply for their own internships, it is usually recommended that you apply to at least three or four potential sites. Because the internship is such an important component of your education, you should consider a variety of factors in deciding where to apply and eventually where to accept an offer. Following are some of the more common issues and questions regarding the process.

Is an internship required for state certification in school psychology?

- All school psychologists must obtain state certification, generally from the state's department of education, to practice school psychology. In almost every state, a supervised internship is required to obtain certification.
- Generally, NASP training standards and NCSP requirements for internship will meet the requirements of individual states. However, it is important to determine any additional requirements for internship that might exist in your state.

What are the NASP training standards for a school psychology internship?

- The internship is a collaboration between the student's training program and the field site. Both must agree in writing on the responsibilities of the training program and internship site for providing supervision, support, and evaluation.

- Time and length: The internship should be completed on a full-time basis over one year or a half-time basis over two years. At least 600 hours of the internship must be completed in a school setting.
- Supervision: Interns must receive an average of at least two hours of field-based supervision per full-time week from a credentialed school psychologist.
- Support: The school system or internship agency must provide support for interns commensurate with that provided to professional school psychologists.
- The complete NASP training standards, including the requirements for internship, are available for review at <http://www.nasponline.org/certification/FinalStandards.pdf>.

What are the national certification (NCSP) requirements for a school psychology internship?

- NCSP requirements are consistent with NASP training standards.
- Time and length: 1200 hours in school psychology, at least 600 hours in a school setting, completed on a full-time basis over one year or a part-time basis over two consecutive years.
- Documentation: to show that the internship was part of an organized program of study, it must be recognized by your graduate institution via institutional documentation. In other words, academic credit for the internship must appear in some form on your graduate school transcript.
- Supervision: an average of at least two hours of field-based supervision per full-time week from a credentialed school psychologist, or if in a non-school setting from an appropriately credentialed psychologist.

Several states accept the NCSP credential in place of specific requirements for internship, coursework, and examination when applying for state certification. While it is likely that the above requirements will satisfy those of your individual state, contact your state's department of education to confirm specific requirements.

What are the internship requirements for doctoral licensure?

- NASP training standards require that doctoral internships include at least 1500 hours of supervised experience, with at least 600 hours in a school (P-12) setting.
- Doctoral graduate students in school psychology who pursue an APA accredited and/or APPIC internship will typically meet state psychology board requirements for licensure as a psychologist. There are a limited number of school based internships that are APA or APPIC accredited. Information about these internships is available at www.apa.org and www.appic.org.
- In order to qualify for NCSP, and for certification through most state departments of education, you must complete at least 600 internship hours or the equivalent in a school (P-12) setting (some states require more school-based experience than this). Thus, if you are considering an internship site that does not include school-based experience, (e.g., at a clinic, hospital, or residential treatment facility), be sure that you have acquired and can document a prior, supervised, school-based internship (e.g., at the master's or specialist level, or as a doctoral requirement that occurs prior to the culminating internship) that meets NASP internship standards.

- Be aware that the licensure requirements may differ by state. Contact your state psychology licensing board for a list of specific internship and documentation requirements for licensure in your state.
- In many cases it is possible to meet your state's requirements for doctoral licensure through a local school-based school psychology internship. Maintain a careful record of the time you spend in each professional activity to submit with your application for licensure. Have your supervisor sign off on this record.
- States differ in their individual requirements for internship. Be sure to check with your individual state's licensing board to determine the requirements that you must meet in your internship for licensure. In general, most states require a year-long, full-time internship of at least 1500 hours supervised by a licensed psychologist. Some states have additional requirements for the number of hours that must be spent in direct service, professional development, and supervision.

At this time NASP is developing an online resource that will include the school psychology credentialing and psychology licensing requirements for each state. When completed, this information will be available on the NASP website.

How do I learn about the internships that are available?

- Consult with your graduate program director or advisor.
- Talk to students in your program who are on internship or have recently completed one. They will be able to tell you about their experiences and the advantages and disadvantages of various sites. They may also be able to assist you with the application process and help you prepare for any interview.
- Contact the directors of psychological services in local school systems to determine if there are positions available.
- Get in touch with your local or state school psychology association and ask about internship sites in your area.
- Look for internship announcements in the NASP *Communique* and other professional newsletters.
- If you are in a doctoral program, contact APA and APPIC for information on accredited internships.

What are the steps of the application process?

- The process will likely vary by program and state. In some programs, the application process is handled internally or informally, while in others students must apply for internships in much the same way that they would apply for a regular position. Be sure to obtain program approval for your internship.
- Although each school district, department of education, or agency may handle the process differently, the general steps are likely to be universal.
- Timelines: Many internship sites require that applications be submitted well in advance of the internship. For example, APA and APPIC internships have a formal application process that must be completed during the fall prior to internship. Many school districts have similar deadlines. Be sure to check the deadlines well in advance. Generally, you should begin your planning at least a year in advance.

- Send a cover letter indicating your interest in an internship as well as your program's internship requirements. Include a personal resume or vita with this letter of introduction and interest.
- Typically, those systems or agencies that are interested in your application will contact you to set up a time for an interview. The interview process will vary widely depending on the system to which you are applying. You may have a series of individual interviews or one interview with several psychologists and administrators. Some systems may require you to submit samples of your work or have you complete a writing sample at the time of your interview.
- You may be contacted for a second-round interview or with an offer of a position. Most school systems have a deadline by which you must provide them with a response. Be sure to follow all requirements and respond to all inquiries and deadlines in a timely manner.
- Determine if some form of temporary or provisional certification or license is required for sites or states you are considering.
- Once you accept a position, develop a written plan with assistance from your program director or advisor. Specify the responsibilities of your training program and internship site in providing supervision, support, and evaluation of performance.

What can I do now to prepare myself for the application process?

- Update your resume or vita. Include any relevant work and research experience that you have had while in graduate school.
- Secure transcripts from both your undergraduate and graduate schools.
- Put together a professional portfolio that includes sample assessment and intervention reports (e.g., from your practica).
- Start thinking about two or three individuals who you will ask for letters of recommendation.
- If you have not already done so, acquire professional malpractice insurance. This is available at a reasonable cost through NASP.

What are some important questions to ask at my internship interview?

- How many interns does the site typically have in any given period, and how many are supervised by any given school psychologist? The fewer the interns, the more likely it is that you will get personal attention. However, many interns note the advantage of interacting with fellow students on internship through skills seminars and group supervision. You will want to find a district that offers a balance that meets your personal needs.
- What are the opportunities for supervision and mentoring from professionals in diverse roles?
- How much room will there be for pursuit of your specific interests? Determine if the internship program has opportunities for you to develop internship experiences in a manner consistent with your goals.
- What is the district or agency conceptualization of the role of a school psychologist? Do school psychologists and interns devote the majority of their time to assessment, or do they engage in a variety of functions including consultation, counseling, behavior analysis and intervention, and other duties consistent with NASP standards? Are there any specific requirements (e.g., number of cases) for particular roles or functions?

- What support is provided to interns? Do interns receive a stipend or salary? Are they provided with access to computers, materials, and other resources needed to perform their duties?
- What professional development opportunities, such as seminars, conferences, and in-service presentations, will be available to you as an intern?
- With which clients/populations will you likely have the opportunity to work during internship?
- Assuming successful completion of the internship, what are the opportunities for full-time employment in the school district or surrounding areas?

What are some things that I should think about when deciding on an internship?

- First and foremost, be sure that your internship meets the requirements for your program, for the state(s) in which you hope to work, and for the NCSP.
- Select an internship that offers well-supervised, diverse opportunities.
- If the internship is unpaid, decide how you will support yourself.
- Consider the professional opportunities that the district or agency is likely to provide. Internship is an important opportunity to establish professional connections and relationships.
- Determine the importance of completing an internship in close proximity to your training program, or in a particular state or region (some programs require students to complete internships in particular sites or regions, while others have special requirements if you do an out-of-state internship).
- Obtain input or approval from your advisor or program director. In many programs, formal approval is required prior to accepting an internship placement.

This fact sheet was developed as part of NASP's graduate student outreach initiative by NASP graduate intern Andrea Cohn (University of Maryland), in collaboration with the NASP Student Development Workgroup and other NASP leaders.

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