

**VA**



**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

# **Doctoral Practicum in Psychology Training Program 2021-2022**

**VA Illiana Health Care System**  
Mental Health Service (116)  
1900 East Main Street  
Danville, IL 61832

[VA Illiana HCS Psychology Training Program Website](#)

Application materials and  
questions about the application process can be directed to:

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Phone: (217) 554-5538

Email: [Julia.FitzgeraldSmith@va.gov](mailto:Julia.FitzgeraldSmith@va.gov)

# Psychology Setting

## ***About the VA Illiana Health Care System:***

The VA Illiana Health Care System (VAIHCS) is an academic medical center that is affiliated with the University of Illinois. We are privileged to provide primary and secondary medical care, surgical care, acute psychiatric care, extended long-term care with skilled nursing, physical rehabilitation, palliative care, and integrated dementia care for those who have honorably served our country. The main facility campus is located in Danville, Illinois, with a full-service outpatient clinic in Peoria, Illinois and community-based outpatient clinics in Bloomington, Decatur, Mattoon, and Springfield Illinois.



The VA Illiana Health Care System was one of the original hospitals or “homes” established after the Civil War, with the location opening in 1898. At one time during its history, the Danville “home” served nearly 4,000 soldiers. Although the resident population has decreased appreciably since that time, the services and physical aesthetics have expanded and improved. The name was changed from “Danville VA” to “VA Illiana Health Care System” in 2001. Major modernization and construction have occurred since that time, leading to the development of a full range of medical services and some of the most modern practices in the United States.



The 215-acre Medical Center grounds are beautifully landscaped with wooded areas, spacious lawns, lake, gardens, and picnic areas. There are nearly 3 miles of concrete walkways, making all parts of the park-like grounds accessible to veterans, staff, and visitors. We also have an extensive library, canteen shop, cafeteria, Starbuck’s café, chapel, healing gardens, regulation bowling alley, and gymnasium. The VA Illiana HCS also shares its grounds with the Danville National Cemetery, which is currently on the National Register of Historic Places.



The VAIHCS also places considerable emphasis on the education and training, particularly within an interdisciplinary setting. Professional training is not only provided to psychology students but also to students of the following specialty areas: psychiatry, audiology and speech pathology, dietetics, general medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, physician assistant (PA), pharmacy, physical therapy, podiatry, recreation therapy, music therapy, and social work.

### ***About the VA Illiana Psychology Service:***

The Psychology Service at VA Illiana includes 23 doctoral-level psychologists. The broad range of expertise, background, and experience represented in the staff is also reflected in the diversity of their professional assignments throughout the Healthcare System. Psychologists work in traditional outpatient and inpatient mental health and rehabilitation settings, as well as in neuropsychology, substance abuse recovery, and health psychology specialties such as primary care, pain management, health prevention and disease prevention, home based health care, and both outpatient and residential geriatric care.

### ***Program Description:***

VA Illiana Psychology offers practicum placements during the Fall and Spring semesters of the academic year, or placements that span the Fall and Spring semesters. Practicum students generally are selected to train in one clinical area per year. There are times that a change in placement or other training opportunity may become available during the practicum. Practicum students are expected to train at least 8, but ideally 16, hours per week, with a typical day beginning at 8:00 am and ending at 4:30 pm. Some placements may require alternate hours (e.g. 7:30-4) to match their supervisor's schedule. The days of the week for a given placement may be coordinated between the student and their supervisor. In reviewing potential placement options, keep in mind that these experiences have been constructed out of active patient care programs and that the availability from year to year is dependent upon staffing.

### ***Eligibility:***

1. U.S. Citizenship. VA is unable to consider applications from anyone who is not a current U.S. Citizen.
2. Doctoral student in good standing at an American Psychological Association (APA) or Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) accredited graduate program in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined psychology or Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS) accredited program in Clinical Science. Persons with a doctorate in another area of psychology who meet the APA or CPA criteria for re-specialization training in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined Psychology are also eligible.

## ***Application and Selection Procedures:***

Applicants to the VA Illiana Psychology Practicum Training Program should send the following in an email to [Julia.FitzgeraldSmith@va.gov](mailto:Julia.FitzgeraldSmith@va.gov):

- A letter of interest that includes:
  - The time frame for which placement is sought (e.g. Fall semester, Spring semester, or both), including specific dates if possible
  - Days of the week anticipated to be available for practicum
  - Number of hours anticipated to be available on site
  - Preferred clinical areas of practicum training, in order of preference
  - Any training program requirements for successful practicum completion (e.g. number of hours, required direct service hours, etc.)
  - Any deadlines the applicant may have with regard to interviewing and/or making a final decision regarding practicum placement
- Updated CV
- Graduate transcripts (Unofficial is acceptable)
- Training Program DCT letter of approval – this can be a brief email noting that the applicant is in good standing and approved for an advanced practicum placement

Practicum applications are due March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. Practicum student applications are reviewed by a panel of psychologists involved in practicum training. Applicants may seek consideration for one or multiple clinical areas but must specify their order of preference if requesting to be considered for multiple areas. Applicants are then selected for a 45-minute interview with two training staff psychologists, which may be conducted virtually. Interviews are conducted mid-March after the APPIC match has been finalized for the next year's internship, as practicum availability is predicated to some degree on the placements of the incoming intern class. Offers will be made to selected practicum students within 2 weeks of the conclusion of interviews, typically the end of March.

### **COVID-19 Impacts:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous personal and professional challenges for all of us. The VA Illiana HCS Psychology training program has prided itself on its transparency, providing detailed and accurate information about our program and training opportunities. That being said, we cannot definitely predict how specific rotations or adjunctive training experiences may evolve for the 2021-2022 training year. We can confidently say that there will likely be more utilization of telehealth and technology-based delivery platforms. We do not expect there to be significant changes to the base clinical services or populations served through the rotations and adjunctive experiences described in our materials. Our dedication to high-quality clinical care, psychology training, and our interns remains strong and a cornerstone of our VA.

# VA Illiana Practicum Placement Options 2021-2022

## 1. Behavioral Health Interdisciplinary Program (BHIP)

*Potential Supervisors:* Dr. Aaron Michelson, Dr. Jinxin Zhang

**Description:** In this placement, psychology practicum students become members of a BHIP team in the Outpatient Mental Health Clinic. BHIP is a multidisciplinary team approach of mental health care professionals who provide comprehensive services to veterans presenting with a wide variety of mental health issues. Team members include a clinical psychologist and social worker, who primarily provide individual psychotherapy, a psychiatrist, a mental health nurse practitioner, a mid-level prescriber, and a medical support assistant. Practicum students will primarily work with individual veterans (adults generally between the ages of 23 to 78), but they may also have an opportunity to work with couples, families, and groups when appropriate. Psychological interventions range from intake assessments for psychotropic medication referrals to short-term and long-term individual psychotherapy, depending on the needs and goals of the veteran. Supervision will be provided for a variety of therapeutic approaches, including Empirically Supported Treatments (also known as Evidence Based Practices in the VA) such as Cognitive Therapy, Integrative Behavioral Couple s Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Practicum students may also gain experience with CBT and Psychosocial Rehabilitation approaches tailored to veterans with serious mental illnesses, such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder. Many veterans seen in the outpatient mental health clinic have experienced military, sexual, and/or childhood trauma, and there may be an opportunity to learn about trauma-focused approaches such as Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure. Although health psychology is not a primary training focus in BHIP, practicum students will likely work with veterans struggling with co-morbid medical issues such as chronic pain, diabetes, and service-connected physical injuries. Depending on availability and on the particular practicum student's skills and interests, there may be opportunity for practicum students to lead or co-lead evidence-based inpatient groups in the Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (PRRTP) such as Motivational Interviewing. There is also the possibility of practicum students developing new groups, again depending upon the practicum student's skills and interests.

Practicum students will be encouraged to develop their own integrative style and utilize appropriate therapeutic techniques to meet the needs of individual veterans, while also being mindful of common factors that significantly impact the process and outcome of psychotherapy. BHIP is a good experience for practicum students who are not only seeking experience working within a multidisciplinary mental health treatment team, but also in a complex and diverse medical setting with a wide variety of programs, clinics, and providers.

## 2. Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PCMHI)

*Supervisor:* Dr. Brandy Mysliwec

**Description:** The philosophy of PCMHI is one of “population-based care,” which is consistent with the primary medical care model, in which a small number of non-specialty services are provided to a large number of people. Goals of this integrated biopsychosocial model of care include increased access to behavioral health consultants who provide rapid feedback, early recognition and brief interventions of mild to moderate severity mental disorders, and improved collaborative care and management of patients with biopsychosocial issues within the primary care setting.

Practicum students in this placement function as interdisciplinary team members across all 8 primary care teams and urgent care clinic to assist the primary care physician (PCP), nurses, social workers, nutritionists and pharmacists in managing the overall health of veterans. The practicum student's role in this placement is to provide:

- brief (30-minute) functional assessments with feedback reported directly to the referring provider,
- triaging to appropriate specialty mental health clinics, and
- individual short-term (4 to 6 sessions) problem/solution-focused, behavioral activation, and goal-setting interventions targeted to reduce symptoms and improve health and quality of life.

The basic treatment approach is based on brief patient interactions that focus on self-management of the presenting problems. Treatment typically involves addressing presenting problems such as mental health issues that can be treated in 4-6 sessions, including: mild to moderate depression, anxiety, PTSD (psychoeducation), adjustment disorders, bereavement/grief, relationship/marital concern, and diagnoses where the patient is having trouble coping with a psychosocial stressor. Additionally, behavioral health concerns will be treated such as: adjustment to medical condition, wellness interventions, sleep disturbance, sexuality, stress, tobacco use cessation, substance misuse, relapse prevention, weight management, chronic illness management, diabetes management, and difficulty with adherence to medical regimens. Treatment interventions are brief, evidence-based, educational/skills-based in nature, and emphasize practice and home-management. Interventions may include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), Problem Solving Therapy (PST), or stress management. Referrals are generated from warm handoffs, formal and informal consultations, and positive screens on depression, alcohol, PTSD measures, etc. that are conducted by nursing during the veteran's primary care visit.

### **3. Pain Management**

*Supervisor:* Dr. Brett Kuykendall

**Description:** This placement focuses on chronic pain patients including quick assessment and development of a pain intervention plan working in a clinic with a multi-disciplinary team. Practicum students in this placement develop skills in the various interventions for pain management including Cognitive Behavioral pain management; hypnosis, brief motivational therapy, ACT and Mindfulness strategies for pain. Treatment is provided individually as well as in a telehealth setting. The opportunity to co-facilitate a pain group may be available depending on patient need.

### **4. Outpatient PTSD**

*Supervisors:* Dr. Katie Keil and Dr. Brian McFarland

**Description:** Practicum applicants should have strong generalist clinical skills and a desire to develop specialized competency in treating trauma. Trainees will learn to evaluate referrals to the clinic using interviewing and psycho-diagnostic skills; this will include comprehensive training in the Clinician Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-5). Trainees will be expected to accrue a small caseload and provide a full range of services to Veterans and their families on an outpatient basis. Individual, group, and couples treatment modalities are used to address both military and non-military traumas. An important training goal will be to acquire and implement a model for understanding and treating trauma that effectively addresses the biological, psychological, affective, and moral injuries sustained from trauma exposure. Trainees will also develop a deeper understanding of some of the unique issues involved in treating military-related trauma, including combat and military sexual trauma (MST). Special emphasis is given to evidence-based treatments, including Prolonged Exposure (PE) Therapy and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT). Based on interest and availability, students may also have the opportunity to receive training in Cognitive Behavioral Conjoint Therapy for PTSD (CBCT), Moral Injury Group, and Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR). The PTSD Clinic utilizes a team approach to training, allowing trainees the opportunity to gain experience working with multiple staff members.

## 5. Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP)

*Potential Supervisor:* Dr. Jeff Debord

**Description:** While SARP is, by definition, considered a substance abuse rehabilitation program with a Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) orientation, we prefer to think of the program as primarily an REBT program that happens to focus largely, though not exclusively, on substance use disorders. The full program is a 6-week, intensive outpatient program, staffed by a psychologist/program coordinator and four addictions therapists. Veterans participating in SARP either commute from home on a daily basis, reside in our PR RTP, or stay at the Salvation Army or Danville Rescue Mission in Champaign and get bussed back and forth every day. We also offer alternative schedules for those who are unable to commit to the full program.

During a placement in SARP, practicum students will become familiar with Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, conduct comprehensive intake interviews, facilitate and/or co-facilitate various groups and classes (e.g., anger management, self-esteem, cravings management, cue exposure, daily lecture, Seeking Safety), provide individual therapy, and gain some familiarity with basics of program management.