



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Professional Geropsychology Postdoctoral Fellowship

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Director of Clinical Training
Behavioral Health Service Line (116A-U)
University Drive C
Pittsburgh PA 15240-1001
(412) 360-1290

Application Due Date: December 20, 2023

Accreditation Status

The postdoctoral fellowship in **Professional Geropsychology** is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association. We are extremely proud of our training programs and their accreditation by the American Psychological Association. Questions related to the program's accredited status should be directed to the Commission on Accreditation:

Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation
American Psychological Association
750 1st Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 336-5979 / E-mail: apaaccred@apa.org
Web: www.apa.org/ed/accreditation

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and Psychology Staff

The VAPHS is a 500-patient bed, joint commission accredited facility comprised of two primary campuses. The University Drive campus, near the University of Pittsburgh, is the medical-surgical facility and includes specialty medical clinics, inpatient medicine units, outpatient behavioral health clinics, three inpatient psychiatry units, and the Center for the Treatment of Addictive Disorders. This campus also includes a referral center for liver and renal transplants and regional cardiac surgery, bariatric, and oncology services. A Fisher House is located at the University Drive campus to support Veterans' families and our Research Office Building houses a wet lab, animal facility, investigational drug service, and clinical research trials. The H. J. Heinz III campus includes the 188 patient-bed Community Living Center, Veteran Recovery Center, Neuropsychology outpatient clinic, primary care clinic, and other clinical services to include dental and rehabilitation medicine. These two campuses are within 10 miles of each other. In July 2023, the majority of our primary care clinics transitioned to our new Monroeville clinic, located in an eastern suburb of Pittsburgh. This large outpatient clinic includes integrated primary and behavioral health care along with specialty and diagnostic services such as rehabilitation, optometry, imaging, lab, and acupuncture. In addition to these two campuses and our Monroeville

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(Updated September 2023)

outpatient clinic , the VAPHS also includes five community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC's) in our catchment area (4 in Pennsylvania and 1 in eastern Ohio) to provide integrated primary and behavioral health care to our Veterans residing in more rural locations. We are proud of our National Centers of Clinical Excellence for renal, dialysis, women Veterans health care, and Geriatric Center of Excellence.

In FY2022, VAPHS provided care to 84,910 Veterans and conducted 753,245 outpatient visits, including 89,128 women Veteran appointments. The VAPHS is increasing services via telehealth technology and conducted 57,739 telemental health visits in FY2022. Veterans span the cohorts from Persian Gulf & Post 9/11 to WWII. Given the large catchment area of the VAPHS to include western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and parts of West Virginia, our Veteran population includes a mix of urban and rural Veterans. The VAPHS serves a diverse Veteran population, including racial, ethnic, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic diversity. As part of the VAPHS commitment to diversity, we have been and continue to be identified as a LGBT healthcare leader for the past several years in the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index. In FY2022, the VAPHS employed 4,395 employees, 25% of whom are Veterans.

All staff and services at the VAPHS are organized into "service lines." The fellowship program is located within the Behavioral Health Service Line. The majority of psychologists at VAPHS are assigned to the Behavioral Health Service Line. The VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System currently employs 55 full-time staff psychologists in Behavioral Health, most of whom are involved in the training program. Our psychology staff has been increasing over the past few years to meet the growing demand for behavioral health services in our increasing VA population. Our staff psychologists' backgrounds, interests, and current activities are diverse. We have supervisors from a variety of graduate programs with varying lengths of tenure at the VAPHS. In addition to their clinical work, our staff psychologists hold many important leadership positions, such as team leaders and medical center committee chairpersons. Our staff members are committed to providing evidence-based treatment approaches to our Veterans. Most supervisors have completed VA certification and have provider status in at least one evidence-based psychotherapy and some are VA trainers for evidence-based psychotherapies (refer to list of training staff for specific information). Our psychology training programs (practicum, doctoral internship, and postdoctoral fellowship) are part of our VA's educational mission which includes many other training programs, such as medicine, social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy, chaplaincy, speech language pathology, and nursing. Our vibrant educational affiliation with the University of Pittsburgh allows trainees from many disciplines to participate in interdisciplinary training at our medical center.

Program Philosophy, Training Model, Program Goals, & Objectives

The mission of the Professional Geropsychology fellowship program is to provide advanced training in the science and practice of geropsychology. Consistent with the Pikes Peak Model of Training in Professional Geropsychology and the Professional Geropsychology Education and Training Guidelines for Postdoctoral Training, the aim of our fellowship is to prepare geropsychologists for independent clinical practice with older adults in a range of professional roles and health service settings using evidence-based practices. Thus, the focus of training is on developing advanced competence in geropsychology

and it is expected that incoming fellows will possess entry-level knowledge and foundational skills in professional geropsychology. During the postdoctoral year, fellows will gain advanced competence through their supervised clinical and scholarly activities. Individual supervision sessions at minimum of two hours per week with staff geropsychologists will promote an integration of case conceptualization, clinical findings, testing results, and psychological interventions. The fellowship program will be truly interdisciplinary in that a portion of clinical activities will occur when working not only with psychologists, but also a variety of other healthcare professionals. Our training philosophy reflects the scholar-practitioner model in that fellows are expected to develop proficiency in both clinical work and scholarly thinking. Consistent with this model, fellows will become familiar with state-of-the-art, evidence-based practice in geropsychology and will integrate scholarly research into clinical practice. It is expected that, by the conclusion of the fellowship year, fellows will develop advanced skills within the following core competency areas: Integration of science and practice; Ethical and legal standards; Individual and cultural diversity; Assessment; Intervention; Consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills; Professional values, attitudes and behaviors; Communication and Interpersonal Skills; Advocacy; and Supervision skills.

Clinical Diversity

The Professional Geropsychology Fellowship is strongly committed to both training in diversity and individual differences as well as the recruitment of fellows from various cultures and diverse groups. To help increase diversity competency and sensitivity, fellows have the opportunity to work with older Veterans of various cohorts, gender identity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and race as well as with Veterans with physical disabilities. Fellows are also immersed in diversity topics in seminars and case conferences and have the opportunity to tailor the diversity seminar series to their personal interests. Fellows may also become members of the Diversity subcommittee of the Clinical Training Committee, the mission of which is to provide training and educational opportunities as they relate to issues of diversity to Psychology staff and trainees. As part of this subcommittee, fellows may serve as co-chair of the subcommittee and may participate in a diversity project, an example of which includes creating a provider's quick guide to asking culturally sensitive questions for dissemination to VAPHS medical staff. The committee also strives to improve recruitment and retention of Psychology staff and trainees from diverse backgrounds. Fellows have also become members of our Interdisciplinary Transgender Treatment Team with active participation in meetings and special events and are encouraged to attend our psychology monthly DEI huddles.

COVID-19 Training Modifications

The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous personal and professional challenges for all of us. The challenges facing all training programs are complex, further complicated by the fluidity and uncertainty of the pandemic. It is difficult for us to confidently predict and/or describe the impact of COVID-19 on our training program for the 2024-2025 training year, Our trainees are currently on-site full-time with private offices assigned to them. Paramount is the importance of maintaining safety for our trainees. Fellows will likely continue to provide a significant component of behavioral health treatment via

telehealth modalities, although the number of Veterans requesting face-to-face appointments is increasing. If providing face-to-face services, appropriate PPE is available and guaranteed Supervision will include a blend of face-to-face and synchronous tele-supervision, although most didactics continue to be offered via virtual modalities due to logistical challenges. We will be happy to describe our current modifications during our virtual interviews and to address any concerns and/or questions regarding our COVID-19 modifications. Our dedication to providing high quality training continues despite the COVID-19 challenges and we are confident that our training program can provide the clinical experiences and supervision to facilitate the personal and professional development of our fellows.

Training Experiences and Program Structure

Training Rotations

Fellows are required to complete two six-month rotations during the training year in a variety of settings, which yield both breadth and depth of training in geropsychology. Each fellow completes the GRECC rotation, which is a required rotation. Each fellow then has the opportunity to design their other rotation based on training goals and interests. Thus, the clinical experience on the fellowship year is as follows:

	First Rotation	Second Rotation
Fellow A	GRECC (Required)	Optional Selections
Fellow B	Optional Selections	GRECC (required)

A description of each rotation follows:

GRECC Rotation (REQUIRED Rotation)

This rotation is comprised of clinical experiences that emphasize interdisciplinary treatment for older veterans and provide the opportunity for training in all competency domains. The fellow typically spends 2 days in the assessment clinics and 2 days in the therapy clinics. The final day of the week includes didactics and supervision.

1. **GEM and GDSC Clinics:** The Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) outpatient clinic at the University Drive division provides comprehensive interdisciplinary evaluation for older veterans to promote independence and successful aging. The GEM team consists of professionals from many disciplines under the direction of a staff geriatrician. Fellow responsibilities include psychological and cognitive evaluations to assess for the presence of psychological syndromes and/or neurocognitive disorders that may impact functional independence. Emphasis is on briefer cognitive assessment (e.g., 1.5 hour interview and testing) with the goal to determine if a neurocognitive disorder is present, possible etiology, and appropriate recommendations for the veteran, family members, and VA providers. The fellow also participates in family feedback conferences to share assessment results and recommendations with the veteran and family. In addition, the fellow also conducts driving safety evaluations for the Geriatric Driving Safety Clinic (GDSC). This is a fast-paced clinic

that provides interdisciplinary evaluation and same-day feedback for older Veterans with identified concerns regarding driving safety.

2. **Outpatient BHIP Clinic:** The fellow will provide evidence-based outpatient psychotherapy to older veterans in the outpatient BHIP therapy clinic. Veterans are referred from a variety of locations (e.g., primary care, behavioral health, etc.), and may provide follow-up psychotherapy to veterans after completion of a GEM evaluation. Presenting problems are varied and include anxiety and mood disorders; adjustment to medical concerns, aging and life transitions; and caregiving stress.

Supervisor: Dr. Bernadette Pasquale

Optional Rotation

The fellow has the opportunity to design this rotation to obtain additional breadth or depth in geropsychology based on training goals and prior training experiences. This rotation can be designed based on the following options:

Community Living Center (CLC): Fellows will work closely with a wide range of disciplines and with medically compromised Veterans in the Community Living Center at the Heinz Division. Fellows are actively involved in at least one CLC unit by attending weekly interdisciplinary team meetings and serving as the main psychology contact for that team, although they are also welcome to take consultations throughout the entire CLC based on identified training goals. Consultation in the CLC may include psychological assessment, brief psychotherapy, brief cognitive assessment, evaluation of decision-making capacity, development of disruptive behavior management plans, and/or staff education. Fellows may lead an adjustment and coping skills group called Vet Strong. Fellows may also have the opportunity to engage in STAR-VA behavioral rounds and formulate STAR-VA behavioral plans. This option is available 2-4 days per week.

Supervisors: Drs. Sabrina Hakim and Trent Thatcher

Neuropsychology Clinic: The Neuropsychology Clinic provides the opportunity for the fellow to work with the staff of the Neuropsychology Clinic at the Heinz Division to conduct comprehensive neuropsychological assessments with older adult veterans including clinical interview; test selection, administration, and scoring; interpretation of assessment data from multiple sources; and report writing. Fellows will also provide feedback of results with recommendations to veterans and their families. This option is available 2 days per week.

Supervisors: Drs. Sara Anderson and Susanne Withrow

Behavioral Medicine: The Behavioral Medicine rotation will provide fellows with opportunities to provide pre-surgical evaluations (e.g., transplant), psych-oncology services, other health-focused individual interventions (e.g., motivational for health behavior change, adjustment to chronic/terminal illness, pain management, insomnia), and facilitate a support group for veterans with Parkinson's Disease in outpatient settings. There may also be opportunities for other health-focused group

interventions as well as possible opportunities to provide intervention, assessment, and consultative services on medical inpatient units. This option is available 1 day per week.

Supervisor: Dr. Patrick Whitmoyer

TeleDementia: The TeleDementia outpatient clinic at the University Drive division provides interdisciplinary evaluation for older, rural veterans via telehealth to the community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC's) in our catchment area. The TeleDementia team consists of a geriatrician, psychologist, and psychiatrist. The purpose of the clinic is to provide follow-up to Veterans who were previously evaluated in the Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) Clinic and who receive their primary care at the CBOC's, or for those who are unable to present in-person to University Drive for evaluation. Fellow responsibilities include virtual psychological and cognitive evaluations to assess for the presence of psychological syndromes and/or neurocognitive disorders that may impact functional independence. Emphasis is on briefer cognitive assessment that can be administered via telehealth (e.g., 1 hour interview and testing) with the goal to determine if a neurocognitive disorder is present, possible etiology, and appropriate recommendations for the Veteran, family members, and VA providers. This option is available 1 day per week (Thursdays only).

Supervisor: Dr. Lauren Jost

CLC Administrative Experience: In this rotation, the Fellow would gain knowledge of and experience working with CLC quality care measures pertaining to behavioral health. Tasks include reviewing medical records as well as using Excel to record data and create charts. Fellows would also attend workgroup and CLC leadership meetings as schedule permits. This option is available 1 day per week.

Supervisor: Dr. Kimberly Christensen

Home Based Primary Care Program: The HBPC program is an interdisciplinary team which provides home care to primarily older adults, many of whom would not otherwise be able to receive care because of their inability to travel. This program is unique in that fellows will provide psychological services in the veteran's home. Fellow responsibilities include assessment (psychological/cognitive evaluation/capacity) and individual/family psychotherapy including caregiver interventions on a consult basis as an integral member of the HBPC treatment team. This option would likely be available 2-3 days per week.

Supervisor: TBD

Quality Improvement and Process Improvement (QAPI) project

The HJ Heinz Community Living Center (CLC) is in the process of implementing the Montessori Approaches to Person Centered Care in the VA or MAP-VA as our required Quality Improvement and Process Improvement (QAPI) project. The MAP-VA is a person-centered non-pharmacological approach that combines rehabilitation principles and educational techniques. This program is focused on creation of a resident-directed community through meaningful engagement, a prepared environment and resident independence. Prior research has shown that these approaches can reduce

key Quality Metrics, including: 1) Given Antianxiety/hypnotic medication but no psych condition in period; 2) Receive antipsychotic medication; 3) and, used antianxiety or hypnotic. We believe that geropsychology fellows and the CLC Veterans would greatly benefit from their mutual participation in the MAP-VA. Fellows interested in this project may elect to participate for the entire year, devoting 1 day per week to this project. Mentoring would occur by GRECC Research staff and Geriatrics and Extended Care administrative/research staff. This is an *optional* experience that could be included throughout the training year.

Supervision Responsibilities/Training

One of the many strengths of our fellowship training program is our commitment to training fellows in supervision competency. Development of supervisory skills is often overlooked in clinical training, resulting in psychologists providing supervision without any formal training in or supervision of supervisory skills. As part of their professional development as psychologists, all fellows will have the opportunity to provide supervision to psychology doctoral interns, under the supervision of a staff geropsychologist. Fellows will be required to provide one hour of supervision per week to an intern. In addition, fellows will be expected to attend the Supervisor Development Series, a program designed for the staff psychologists to discuss supervisory issues and refine supervisory skills, and receive supervision training during the Professional Development Seminar series. Furthermore, fellows will attend the monthly supervisor meetings and will serve on the Clinical Training Committee by attending quarterly meetings and assisting with the selection of interns and fellows.

Didactics

The fellows will attend at least one hour of required geropsychology seminars per week, as follows:

1. ***GRECC Didactic Series:*** Weekly GRECC didactics are held on Fridays for trainees in all disciplines funded by the GRECC. These didactics include a case conference and core lecture series on geriatric topics. The fellow assigned to the GRECC rotation is required to attend both didactics each week and has the opportunity to present seminars and case presentations for this series.
2. ***Geropsychology Journal Club:*** During this monthly journal club, fellows, interns, and staff psychologists rotate selecting current articles in the field of geropsychology for review and discussion. Both geropsychology fellows attend this didactic for the entire year. During the first month of every quarter, a ***Geropsychology Ethical Practice Seminar*** is held to focus on discussion of ethical dilemmas within geropsychology. This seminar will include both review of literature and case discussion as preparation for the ethical practice component of the geropsychology board certification process.
3. ***Geropsychology Fellowship Diversity Seminar:*** The Geropsychology Fellowship Diversity Seminar is a series of seminars designed for geropsychology fellows that are held during the year. These seminars focus on multicultural considerations in the assessment and treatment of older adults, such as cultural considerations at end of life, ageism, and considerations in

psychotherapy with LGBT older adults. The fellowship staff supervisors serve as the presenters for these seminars. Both geropsychology fellows are required to attend this didactic.

4. **Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Aging Veterans: Promising Practices:** This monthly virtual national VA seminar series addresses best practices and emerging trends in geropsychology, particularly within VHA. Both geropsychology fellows may attend this seminar for the entire year.

The fellows also have the option of attending our weekly VAPHS neuropsychology didactic series which consists of case conferences and seminars addressing various topics, such as neurocognitive disorders, medical factors affecting cognition, neurological disorders, and ethical considerations in neuropsychological assessment.

In addition to at least one hour of weekly geropsychology seminars, the fellows will participate in the 1-hour weekly Fellowship Seminar Series with the 3 clinical psychology fellows. This seminar series provides the opportunity for fellows to socialize during the week and share experiences and knowledge of clinical psychology. The seminar series includes:

1. **Professional Development Seminar:** Dr. Pasquale facilitates this seminar which incorporates lecture, discussion, and reading on supervisory development, ethical issues, and professional growth.
2. **Fellowship Case Conference:** During this case conference, fellows rotate presenting a case with staff psychologists rotating as facilitators.
3. **Fellowship Seminar:** Psychology staff present lectures/discussions on a professional topic in clinical psychology.
4. **Supervisor Development Series:** This bimonthly seminar is attended by fellows and staff psychologists. A scholarly article regarding supervision of psychology trainees is chosen for discussion during each meeting.
5. **Diversity Seminars:** Fellows will attend various fellow-directed diversity seminars. Each fellow will select a diversity topic and present either a case example and/or scholarly literature to facilitate discussion.

Supervision and Evaluation

The psychology postdoctoral fellowship supervisors are dedicated to providing quality supervision to fellows. All supervisory sessions are intended to offer meaningful feedback to the fellow in order to increase understanding of his/her clinical strengths and weaknesses and to facilitate professional growth. As aids in the supervisory process, digital recording, direct observation, and co-therapy may be used. While the primary focus of supervisory sessions is on the development of advanced clinical skills, other issues such as administrative dynamics, professional ethics, and cultural issues are often addressed. Fellows receive a minimum of two hours of formal individual supervision weekly. Supervisors are also available on an as needed basis beyond the regularly scheduled times of supervision.

Progress towards the attainment of the training goals is determined by means of regularly scheduled evaluations. Feedback between fellows and supervisors is on going. Monthly evaluations are discussed informally with the fellow and at a monthly supervisors' meeting chaired by the Director of Clinical Training. A mid-rotation evaluation occurs at the 3-month and 9-month time points with the supervisor reviewing the fellow's progress thus far in terms of the specific skills defined within each core competency area. At the conclusion of each six-month rotation, a formal evaluation of the fellow's progress is made. This evaluation is discussed with the fellow prior to submission to the Director of Clinical Training for inclusion in the fellow's training record. In conjunction with the supervisor's evaluation of the fellow, each fellow is asked to evaluate the supervisor. Fellows are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and that of the fellowship critically so that the evaluation process is not merely unidirectional.

Requirements for Completion

For fellows to remain in good standing in the program, fellows must achieve at least a majority of ratings of "3" in each competency area on the rotation evaluation form at mid-year, indicating that competency for each skill item is at the level beyond the start of the postdoctoral training year, but below that expected at the conclusion of the postdoctoral training year. In addition, fellows must not engage in any ethical violations to maintain good standing in the program.

To successfully complete the fellowship program, fellows must achieve the following requirements:

1. A fellow must complete the entire year of training (i.e., 2080 hours).
2. A fellow must be in "good standing" and removed from any probationary status.
3. By the conclusion of the training year, a fellow must achieve a rating of "4" for every competency skill in each competency domain on the final Evaluation of Fellow Performance, indicating that a fellow has demonstrated advanced competency for this skill defined as the ability to generalize geropsychology skills and knowledge to novel and/or complex situations, demonstrate expertise in the broad range of geropsychology clinical and professional activities, and demonstrate ability to serve as an expert resource in geropsychology to other professionals in these domains.

Facility and Training Resources

All fellows are assigned an individual office with most offices located in the clinic where the fellow works. Offices are generally in close proximity to supervisors to promote informal supervision and consultation. All fellows have a personal computer in their office with access to the computerized patient record system, e-mail, Internet, and Microsoft software. The fellows are also given access to the VA voice mail system. Psychological and neuropsychological testing equipment is available to fellows through our psychology technicians as well as part of the assessment software in the computerized patient record system. To assist with development of psychotherapy and supervision skills, fellows have access to USB compact microphones to record sessions onto computers for supervision purposes. Medical libraries are located at both divisions and fellows have access to journals, interlibrary loans, and

computer-based literature searches. Our medical librarians are extremely helpful in assisting staff and fellows to retrieve selected journal articles and books from other sources.

Fellows may park on both campuses; parking is free of cost. The VA medical center also operates a shuttle system that interns may utilize to travel between divisions for meetings and didactics.

The stipend for the training year is \$53,661. The start date is tentatively 8/26/24. Fellows can elect to participate in federal health insurance plans. Fellows earn annual leave (personal time off) and sick leave at the rate of 4 hours every two weeks. Maternity/Paternity leave is also available through use of sick leave, annual leave, and then Leave Without Pay (LWOP), with any LWOP hours to be made up at the end of the training year. In addition to the annual leave and sick leave, we grant time away from the medical center for fellows to attend approved training activities and conferences, including taking the psychology licensure examination. Although there is no limit to the amount of approved time away from the medical center that a fellow may use, permission will only be granted when a fellow is making satisfactory progress in meeting the requirements of his/her rotation.

Mentorship: Given research demonstrating the value of mentorship in professional development, the Diversity subcommittees assists fellows to identify a mentor from the psychology staff. The selected mentor will not be in an evaluative role with the fellow and discussions within the mentorship relationship are considered confidential.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

During orientation to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, fellows are provided a training manual that contains important policies and information for the fellowship program as well as for the medical center. Included in the training manual is our grievance and due process policy concerning identification and resolution of problems arising during the internship year. Copies of all evaluation forms are also included in the training manual. Copies of our evaluation forms and grievance policy are available to interested applicants upon request.

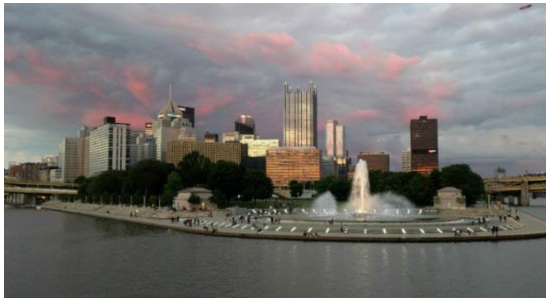
Trainees

Since the inception of our postdoctoral program in 2000, we have accepted fellows from clinical and counseling Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs. Fellows have completed internships in various VA medical centers, including our own, as well as other programs, such as state hospitals and psychiatry departments within university medical centers. The majority of our fellows have accepted staff psychologist positions at VA Medical Centers (including our own). Many of our fellows have enjoyed the transition to Pittsburgh and have remained in the Pittsburgh area, suggesting that Pittsburgh is a desirable city in which to reside!

During exit interviews with fellows over the past several years, fellows have consistently identified three strengths of our fellowship program. First, fellows have commented that both the breadth and depth of training experiences in geropsychology are a significant strength of our program as fellows have the

opportunity to work in outpatient clinics, assessment clinics, residential units, and in veteran's home. Second, fellows have consistently described both the quality and quantity of supervision as strengths. Fellows have remarked that supervisors are always available for scheduled supervision in addition to informal consultation and emergency supervision. Our supervisors have been described as enthusiastic, dedicated, and invested in training and the professional growth of fellows. Finally, fellows have noted that the training they received in supervision significantly increased their supervision competency and is a noteworthy strength of this training program.

Local Information



Pittsburgh is located in southwestern Pennsylvania, where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers meet to form the Ohio River. Contrary to popular belief, Pittsburgh is no longer the industrial steel town of the 50's and 60's. In 2017 WalletHub compared 62 of the largest U.S. cities and Pittsburgh ranked #3 of the best cities in which to live and CNBC named Pittsburgh the 2nd best city for millennials in 2017. Also in 2017,

MONEY named the East Liberty and Lawrenceville neighborhoods as the #1 coolest neighborhoods in America! The downtown area and riverfront have undergone massive renovation, and several vibrant sub-communities have emerged over the past decade. An exciting blend of old and new, Pittsburgh is a city of history, business, culture, research, medicine, sports, and recreation that pleasantly surprises newcomers!

The largest metropolitan area in the Ohio Valley and Appalachia, Pittsburgh is a growing city. “The Steel City” has 446 bridges, creating a unique urban terrain within a beautiful natural valley. The city is home to numerous diverse cultural groups, and offers a variety of authentic world cuisines within our various districts. For lovers of the culinary arts, you will find a variety of coffee shops, bakeries, and restaurants. Rich in American history, Pittsburgh also has a growing art and cultural scene. It is the home of the Andy Warhol Museum, the Carnegie library system, and has numerous universities and colleges such as University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, Duquesne, Carlow, and Chatham, creating a constant influx of energy, creative thought, and activity. There are also a wide variety of entertainment opportunities, including events at PPG Paints Arena, local music venues, as well as Broadway shows in the downtown theatre district. The city is ideal for families, with a local zoo, aquarium, the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, and the National Aviary. Sports enthusiasts will be welcomed into the loyal hometown community, supporting the Pirates, Steelers, and Penguins. With its unique location, Pittsburgh also offers easy accessibility to a variety of city and state parks, water sports, caving systems, and wildlife preserves, creating a multitude of activities for naturalists.

For more information about our exciting city and the diversity of “the ‘Burgh”, view these websites:

- [Visit Pittsburgh | Official Tourism Site for Pittsburgh, PA](#)
- [PUMP - Pittsburgh, PA | Get Active. Be Connected. Create Change.](#)

- [Home | Cool Pittsburgh | University of Pittsburgh](#)
- [City Cast Pittsburgh](#)
- [About QBurgh - LGBTQ Pittsburgh News & Community](#)
- [Stonewall Sports Pittsburgh - Community. Sports. Fun. \(stonewallsportspgh.org\)](#)

Many of our trainees have enjoyed their experience in Pittsburgh and have offered the following testimonials:



“I was surprised with how much I fell in love with PGH during my internship year...I loved how different neighborhoods had their own unique identity, I loved the easy access to large parks within the city, and loved how beautiful PGH is with all its hills, bridges, and public art. What a gem of a city!”

“PGH has a ‘small city’ feel and it’s easy to find your niche here. At the same time, it’s a vibrant place to live, with lots going on. There is something for

everyone—whether you love hiking and spending time outside or watching sports, or going to museums.”

“The great dining and food scene, and the very reasonable cost of living compared to other regions.”

“The city had a lot more diversity and cultural activities than I expected. Lots of great places to eat and things to do. I like the ethnic diversity of my neighborhoods. Easy access to natural areas inside and outside the city.”

“I found lots of social groups/clubs outside of work and made many friends that I still stay in touch with after leaving the area.”

Application & Selection Procedures

Prior to the start of the fellowship, a candidate must have completed the following requirements:

1. Have received a doctorate from an APA or CPA accredited graduate program in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined Psychology or PCSAS accredited Clinical Science program. Persons with a doctorate in another area of psychology who meet the APA or CPA criteria for respecialization training in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined Psychology are also eligible.
2. Have completed an internship program accredited by APA or CPA or have completed a VA-sponsored internship.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) adheres to all Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action policies. As a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Health Professions Trainee

(HPT), you will receive a Federal appointment, and the following requirements will apply prior to that appointment:

1. **U.S. citizenship.** VA is unable to consider applications from anyone who is not currently a U.S. citizen. Verification of citizenship is required following selection. All fellows must complete a Certification of Citizenship in the United States prior to beginning VA training.
2. **U.S. Social Security Number.** All VA appointees must have a U.S. social security number (SSN) prior to beginning the pre-employment, on-boarding process at the VA.
3. **Selective Service Registration.** Male applicants born after 12/31/1959 must have registered for the Selective Service by age 26 to be eligible for U.S. government employment, including selection as a paid or WOC VA trainee. For additional information about the Selective Service System, and to register or to check your registration status visit <https://www.sss.gov/>. Anyone who was required to register but did not register before the age of 26 will need to apply for a Status Information Letter (SIL) and request a waiver. Waiver requests are rare and will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Waiver determinates are made by the VA Office of Human Resources Management and can take six months for a verdict.
4. **Fingerprint Screening and Background Investigation.** All HPTs will be fingerprinted and undergo screenings and background investigations. Additional details about the required background checks can be found at the following website: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>.
5. **Drug Testing.** Per Executive Order 12564 the VA strives to be a Drug-Free Workplace. Health Professional Trainees (HPTs) are exempt from drug-testing prior to appointment, however interns are subject to random drug testing throughout the entire VA appointment period. You are required to sign an acknowledgement form stating you are aware of this practice prior to receiving your formal offer of employment. Please note that VA will initiate termination of VA appointment and/or dismissal from VA against any trainee who is found to use illegal drugs on the basis of a verified positive drug test (even if a drug is legal in the state where training) or refuses to be drug tested. Health Profession Trainees will be given the opportunity to justify a positive test result by submitting supplemental medical documentation to a Medical Review Officer when a confirmed positive test could have resulted from legally prescribed medication.
6. **TQCVL.** To streamline on-boarding of HPTs, VHA OAA requires completion of a Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter (TQCVL). Following selection and prior to the start of training, the Director of Clinical Training will request the following documents from you to complete the TQCVL. Your VA appointment cannot happen until the TQCVL is submitted and signed by senior leadership from the VA facility. This document requires that you confirm the following health information and required vaccines for healthcare workers:
 - Evidence or self-certification that you are physically and mentally fit to perform the essential functions of the training program
 - Evidence of tuberculosis screening and testing per CDC health care personnel guidelines
 - Evidence or self-certification of up-to-date vaccinations for healthcare workers as recommended ty the CDC and VA to include: Hepatitis B, MMR (Measles,

Mumps, & Rubella), Varicella (Chickenpox), Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis), Annual Flu vaccine, and COVID-19 vaccination.

7. **Additional Forms.** Additional pre-employment forms include the Application for Health Professions Trainees (VA 10-2850D) and the Declaration for Federal Employment (OF 306). Falsifying any answer on these required Federal documents will result in the inability to appoint or immediate dismissal from the training program.
8. **Proof of Identity per VA.** VA on-boarding requires presentation of two source documents (IDs). Documents must be unexpired and names on both documents must match. Examples of source documents include US Passport or US Passport Card, driver's license or state issued ID card, US military card, US Social Security card, or an original or certified copy of a birth certificate.

Please note: Health Professions Trainees (HPTs) are appointed as temporary employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. As such, HPTs are subject to laws, policies, and guidelines posted for VA staff members. There are infrequent times in which this guidance can change during a training year which may create new requirements or responsibilities for HPTs. If employment requirements change during the course of a training year, HPTs will be notified of the change and impact as soon as possible and options provided. The VA Training Director for your profession will provide you with the information you need to understand the requirement and reasons for the requirement in timely manner.

Applicants who have completed VA internships and who have an interest in a VA career are strongly encouraged to apply. We desire candidates with prior experience in geropsychology, either at the practicum and/or internship levels. Applicants with both clinical and research experience in geropsychology are highly desirable. We value applicants with the ability to engage in scholarly inquiry and critical analysis of the scholarly literature. Given our focus on providing evidence based treatment to our veterans, we value applicants who have training in evidence based treatment approaches. Further, given the diversity of the veterans receiving treatment through the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, we encourage applicants from graduate and internship programs with a multicultural focus and experience with ethnic, cultural, and social minority groups. Our fellowship program values cultural and individual diversity and strongly encourages qualified applicants from all backgrounds to apply. We adhere to all EEO guidelines. The United States government is a non-discriminatory, affirmative action employer. Federal law prohibits discrimination based on age, sex, race, creed, color, religion, handicap or national origin.

The application process formally begins when an applicant submits the following materials:

1. Cover letter indicating reasons for your interest in our program, status on internship with expected completion date, and status of dissertation/doctoral project with anticipated completion date.
2. Official transcripts of all graduate work in psychology.
3. Current curriculum vitae.

4. Three letters of recommendation with at least one from a primary clinical supervisor who can describe clinical work and skills in geropsychology.
5. Letter from the applicant's dissertation chairperson verifying the applicant's current status on his/her dissertation research. If an applicant's dissertation is not completed at the time of application, this letter should also include the chairperson's estimate of when the applicant's dissertation will be completed.
6. Letter from the applicant's internship director of clinical training verifying the applicant's internship status and expected completion date.
7. A personal statement describing: history of applicant's interest in geropsychology, self-assessment of training needs with goals for fellowship, and statement of career goals (one-page limit).

All applications must be submitted via the APPA CAS [APPIC Psychology Postdoctoral Application] online centralized application system. No paper applications will be accepted or reviewed. The APPA CAS can be accessed via the following link: <https://appicpostdoc.liaisoncas.com>

The deadline for all completed application materials is December 20, 2023. Only applications completed by this deadline will be considered.

Applications will be reviewed by three independent reviewers of the Clinical Training Committee and rated on a 10-point scale. Applicants are then ranked by total score (0-30 total) and selected applicants will be invited for interviews. Invited applicants are required to participate in 2 individual virtual interviews with staff supervisors. We are only offering virtual interviews; no on-site interviews will be offered or permitted. We are also offering 2 optional virtual open houses, during which candidates can obtain additional information about the program from the Director of Clinical Training, attend a panel discussion with training faculty, and attend a panel discussion with current and former fellows. Dates for these optional virtual open houses are TBD. Points obtained during the interview process are added to the application score and offers are rendered per a rank order list created by total point score. Our program will abide by the APPIC Postdoctoral Common Hold Date selection guidelines. As such, we hope to begin offering positions on approximately 2/1/2024 and candidates may hold offers until the Common Hold Date of 2/26/2024. The program will follow the Common Hold Date process on 2/26/2024 for any unfilled positions.

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to Dr. Bernadette Pasquale at Bernadette.Pasquale@va.gov.

Psychologist Training Supervisors

Sara E. Anderson, Psy.D. is a staff neuropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Dr. Anderson earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from the Virginia Consortium Program in Clinical Psychology in 2010. She completed her internship at the Coatesville VA Medical Center in 2010 and completed a two-year neuropsychology fellowship at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System in 2012.

Dr. Anderson is a supervisor for the Neuropsychology Clinic and facilitates neuropsychology didactics. Her primary clinical interests include: neuropsychology, symptom validity testing, traumatic brain injury, dementias, and cognitive rehabilitation.

Kimberly A. Christensen, Ph.D., is a staff Geropsychologist at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and is the Geropsychology/Neuropsychology Program Manager. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Kent State University in 2000. Dr. Christensen completed an internship at the Buffalo VA Medical Center in 2000 focusing on Geropsychology as well as a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical psychology with an emphasis in Geropsychology at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in 2001. She is the primary supervisor for the CLC Administrative Rotation. She maintains clinical responsibilities in the Community Living Center at the Heinz Division. Dr. Christensen's primary clinical interests include provision of psychological services in long-term care. She has also completed VA training and consultation in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression and has provider status.

Sabrina Hakim, Psy.D. is a staff geropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, HJ Heinz Division. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology with a concentration in health psychology from the University of Indianapolis in 2019. Dr. Hakim completed her internship in the health psychology track at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit, Michigan. She completed her post-doctoral fellowship in geropsychology at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in 2020. She maintains clinical responsibilities at the H. J. Heinz Community Living Center (CLC), and her primary clinical interests include cognitive assessment of older adults, staff training, capacity assessment, nonpharmacologic behavior management, and multiculturalism. She is one of the supervisors for the CLC rotation component. Dr. Hakim has completed VA training in STAR-VA and serves as the Behavioral Coordinator at VAPHS.

Lauren Jost, Psy.D. is a geropsychologist who works for the Caregiver Support Program at VISN 4. She also provides clinical services to VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). Dr. Jost earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Xavier University in 2014. She completed her internship in clinical psychology at VAPHS in 2014, and completed her postdoctoral fellowship in professional geropsychology at VAPHS in 2015. In her clinical role, Dr. Jost serves as the clinical psychologist for the TeleDementia Clinic, performing clinical video telehealth evaluations of older adults who have a neurocognitive disorder. The TeleDementia clinic is a part of the Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) Clinic. Her clinical and research interests include: dementia, cognitive assessment of older adults, caregiving, end-of-life decisions, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Bernadette M. Pasquale, Ph.D., ABPP is a staff geropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and is the Director of Clinical Training for the internship and fellowship programs. Dr. Pasquale earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Ohio University in 1995. She completed her internship at the Miami VA Medical Center in 1994 and completed a geropsychology fellowship at the Cleveland VA Medical Center in 1996. She is board certified in Geropsychology. Dr. Pasquale has clinical responsibilities in the outpatient BHIP clinic and GEM/GDSC clinics. She is the primary supervisor for the fellow on the GRECC rotation. Her primary clinical interests include: cognitive assessment of older adults and supervision/training. Dr. Pasquale has also completed VA training and consultation in Cognitive

Behavioral Therapy for Depression and has provider status. Her personal interests include biking the great trails in this area, powerwalking, baking, and most recently—playing pickleball.

Trent T. Thatcher, Psy.D., is a staff geropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). He earned his doctorate in clinical psychology from Wright State University in 2003. Dr. Thatcher completed his predoctoral internship at the VAPHS in 2003, as well as a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical psychology with an emphasis in geropsychology at the VAPHS in 2004. He is one of the primary supervisors for the fellow on the CLC rotation component. He maintains clinical responsibilities at the H.J. Heinz Community Living Center, and his primary clinical interests include provision of capacity evaluation and cognitive assessment of older adults, individual therapy in long-term care, disruptive behavior management, ethics, and consultation and direct intervention with older adults receiving palliative and hospice care. Dr. Thatcher has completed didactic VA training and consultation in Motivational Interviewing (MI) and has provider status. Dr. Thatcher also holds VA certification in Guided Imagery and he has completed specialized training in Geropsychology through the VA Geriatric Scholars and the Center to Advance Palliative Care programs. Personal interests include hiking, travel, enjoying different ethnic festivals and foods, cooking, and spending time with my wonderful family and Great Pyrenees dog!

Patrick Whitmoyer, Ph.D., is a Behavioral Medicine Psychologist at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. He is also an active member of the Psychology Diversity Subcommittee. He provides clinical care at the University Drive division and HJ Heinz clinics. Dr. Whitmoyer earned his doctorate in clinical health psychology from The Ohio State University in 2020. He completed his pre-doctoral internship in the Health Psychology track of the VA Maryland Health Care System/University of Maryland-School of Medicine Consortium with primary placements in Hospice and Palliative Care, Health Psychology, and Geropsychology at the VA Maryland Health Care System. He then completed the Professional Geropsychology fellowship at VA Pittsburgh. Dr. Whitmoyer's interests include pre-surgical and pre-treatment psychosocial assessment, health behavior change, psychosocial adjustment to chronic illness, neurocognitive disorders, functional neurological symptom disorders, geropsychology, and capacity assessment. Personal interests include hiking, camping, playing basketball, reading, and spending time with friends/family. Dr. Whitmoyer is an avid fan of sci-fi and Duke basketball.

Susanne Withrow, Ph.D. is a staff neuropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. She completed a doctorate in clinical health psychology from the University of Colorado Denver in 2019. Dr. Withrow is a proud alumna of the VA Pittsburgh psychology internship program where she completed the neuropsychology track. She continued her training at VA Central Western Massachusetts in Worcester and Northampton, MA where she completed a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology. Dr. Withrow has experience in providing inpatient and outpatient neuropsychological evaluations and cognitive compensatory training. Her research interests focus on performance validity testing, applications of the Boston Process Approach, and the effect of medical conditions on cognition.