

VA Maryland Health Care System

Psychology Externship Program

2024-2025 Training Year



TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Diversity Statement</u>	3
<u>Clinical Settings</u>	3
<u>Program Overview</u>	4
<u>Training Model and Program Philosophy</u>	4
<u>Role of the Staff</u>	5
<u>Role of the Extern</u>	5
<u>Clinical Supervision and Support</u>	6
<u>Training Term</u>	6
<u>COVID-19 Impact on Training</u>	6
<u>Clinical Placements</u>	7
<u>Neuropsychology - Baltimore Annex or Perry Point</u>	7
<u>Outpatient Mental Health Clinic – Baltimore</u>	8
<u>Neuropsychology/Health Psychology Combined– Baltimore Annex/Perry Point</u>	9
<u>Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Treatment– Baltimore</u>	10
<u>VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) - Baltimore</u>	11
<u>Didactic Opportunities</u>	14
<u>Diversity Seminar Series</u>	14
<u>Additional Didactic Opportunities</u>	14
<u>How to Apply</u>	15
<u>Applicant Eligibility</u>	15
<u>Application Procedures</u>	15
<u>Selection Procedures</u>	16
<u>Contact Information</u>	16

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Psychology Externship Program Training Brochure. We appreciate your interest and hope this brochure provides you with information that can assist you in making a well-informed decision regarding your future training. Thank you again for your interest!

Diversity Statement

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to ensuring equal employment opportunity (EEO), promoting diversity and inclusion, and resolving workplace conflict constructively to maintain a high performing workforce in service to our Nation's Veterans. To that end, the Department will vigorously enforce all applicable Federal EEO laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and Management Directives to ensure equal opportunity in the workplace for all VA employees. For additional information, please consult the VA EEO Policy at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/statement.aspx> or contact the VAMHCS EEO office.

The VAMHCS Psychology Training Program is deeply committed to cultural and other dimensions of diversity, and encourages applicants from all backgrounds, including individuals who have often been underrepresented in health care settings such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Veterans, LGBTQIA+, individuals reflecting diverse gender identities, and individuals with disabilities. The VAMHCS Psychology Training Program does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. Trainees are taught to consider dimensions and intersections of diversity in every aspect of their work.

Clinical Settings

VA Maryland Health Care System

The Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) is a dynamic and progressive health care organization dedicated to providing high-quality, compassionate, and accessible care and service to Maryland's Veterans. Nationally recognized for its outstanding patient safety and cutting-edge technology, the VA Maryland Health Care System is proud of its reputation as a leader in Veterans' health care, research, and education. The Baltimore, Loch Raven, and Perry Point VA Medical Centers, in addition to five community-based outpatient clinics, all work together to form this integrated health care delivery system. Most clinical training opportunities occur in the medical centers, described more fully below.

In 2022, the VAMHCS recorded >665,000 separate outpatient encounters, with over 54,000 unique Veterans served. Of Veterans who received mental health care, the demographic characteristics were approximately: 49% White, 49% Black/African American, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Hispanic/Latinx. Roughly 85 percent of these Veterans identified as male, but with an increasing number of Veterans who identify as female receiving care as well. Approximately 65% of Veterans served are above age 55. The sheer volume of Veterans treated across the variety of clinics ensures that interns are exposed to Veterans who range in age across the adult spectrum, and who represent various racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, and military affiliations and experiences. Currently, Veterans from a variety of service eras (e.g., World War II, Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf) are represented, with the highest proportion from Vietnam, post-Vietnam, and Persian Gulf eras. Interns encounter a spectrum of degrees of complexity in presenting mental health and medical concerns of Veterans served and with enough frequency to establish sound baseline knowledge of a variety of psychological phenomena.

Baltimore VA Medical Center: The Baltimore VA Medical Center is located in a vibrant city neighborhood on the campus of the University of Maryland at Baltimore (UMB) and is within walking distance of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, M&T Bank Stadium, Lexington Market and the Inner Harbor. The Baltimore VA Medical Center is the acute medical and surgical care facility for the VAMHCS and offers a full range of inpatient, outpatient and primary care services, as well as a number of specialized programs and services, including integrated mental health in primary care programs, a women Veterans evaluation and treatment program, health psychology and treatment for chronic pain, inpatient and outpatient mental health care services, and an intensive outpatient substance abuse detoxification and treatment program. Three blocks from the medical center, the Baltimore Annex offers outpatient mental health programming in the following specialty areas: trauma recovery, neuropsychology, and psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery.

Perry Point VA Medical Center: The Perry Point VA Medical Center is located about 45 minutes north of Baltimore on a beautiful campus of approximately 400 acres on the banks of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. It provides a broad range of inpatient, outpatient, and primary care services and is a leader in providing comprehensive mental health care to Maryland's Veterans. The medical center offers recovery-focused residential and outpatient mental health and substance abuse care, including the following specialized treatment programs:

- Mental Health Intensive Case Management
- Outpatient Mental Health Clinic
- Primary Care-Mental Health Integration
- Veteran Whole Health
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center
- Community Living Center/Geropsychology-Neuropsychology
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Outpatient Program
- Trauma Intervention & Dual Diagnosis Empowerment Service Intensive Outpatient Program
- Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (SARRTP)
- Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (PRRTP)
- Domiciliary Residential Treatment (for Homeless Veterans)

Loch Raven VA Medical Center: The Loch Raven VA Medical Center specializes in providing inpatient, outpatient and primary care services. As a leader in providing rehabilitation and skilled nursing care, the medical center coordinates the delivery of rehabilitation services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, kinesiotherapy and recreation therapy, to achieve the highest level of recovery and independence for Maryland's Veterans. The center also provides hospice and nursing home care to Veterans requiring non-acute inpatient care, in addition to offering specialized assistance for patients with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs): Each of our CBOCs provide primary care and limited specialty medical care services. Every CBOC offers Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI), telemental health services, as well as specialty mental health services. Some of the larger CBOCs provide PTSD and Substance Use Disorder services.

- Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic
- Eastern Baltimore County
- Fort Meade VA Outpatient Clinic
- Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic
- Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinic

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Training Model and Program Philosophy

The VAMHCS Psychology Externship Program aspires to the scientist-practitioner approach to training. This is considered an aspirational goal given the primary emphasis on clinical training during this externship placement. Although research training is not part of these placements, our Program strives to incorporate evidence-based practice for the psychological treatment of mental illness and other conditions for the effective care of patients. Our externs actively engage in clinical service that supports their ability to, as clinically indicated: 1.) identify and clearly describe the disorders and conditions presented by patients, 2.) select or create reliable and valid outcome measures that are sensitive to changes in patients' disorders or conditions, and 3.) identify and successfully administer treatments to improve these disorders or conditions.

The Program is particularly interested in applicants from graduate programs that place an equally strong emphasis on scientific study and broad clinical training. It is expected that applicants have solid foundational training and skills across a range of clinical populations, evidence-based practices, and with objective psychological assessments.

While adhering to a scientist-practitioner approach to training that underscores evidence-based practice, the Program aims to train and refine skills in core competency domains with the ultimate goal of facilitating the development of externs by advancing their training and preparing them for internship. As an illustration, specific training in assessment or treatment for a particular presenting problem will be grounded in research, clinical practice guidelines, and expert consensus on that problem. To round out existing scientific and clinical skills, extensive efforts are made to tailor the externship training experience to each individual extern's needs and allow a reasonable amount of focused specialization in each extern's area of emphasis.

Role of the Staff

Program staff and supervisors are held to the highest levels of professional and ethical conduct. They are expected to both model these behaviors and promote extern engagement in the following: 1.) ethical and responsible clinical and scientific conduct, 2.) participation in self-regulatory and professional review activities, 3.) commitment to continued professional self-development through participation in training and educational activities, and 4.) activities promoting professional autonomy, such as active involvement with local, state, and national organizations, legislative efforts, and licensure activities.

Role of the Extern

Program externs are expected to assume the role of professional psychologist within their training assignments. This role requires awareness of and adherence to the highest principles of professional ethics, conduct, and competence, as well as a sincere interest in the welfare of clients. Externs have the opportunity to learn new clinical skills and techniques from their supervisors and other staff, as well as the opportunity to improve and modify existing skills. The majority of an extern's time is focused on development and expansion of clinical competencies. Though externs are expected to conduct themselves professionally, their tasks are primarily learning-oriented. Although there is some variability across training sites, clinical service delivery is considered incidental to the learning process. Externs are not expected to assume the same quantity of duties, workload, or responsibilities normally assigned to the professional psychology staff.

Externs are expected to be involved in their clinical training assignments to the benefit of the VAMHCS health care delivery systems and their own learning experiences. Externs are expected to adhere to the ethical guidelines established for psychologists by the American Psychological Association and to the policies and procedures of their host institution and clinics.

Clinical Supervision and Support

Externs receive a minimum of two hours per week of supervision, at least one hour of which is individual, face-to-face supervision with a licensed psychologist. Supervisors are readily available to respond to externs' questions and provide impromptu guidance. When an extern's primary supervisor is on leave, back-up coverage is clearly delineated. At the beginning of training, the supervisor and extern jointly assess the extern's training needs and establish individualized training goals.

Staff psychologists with appropriate clinical privileges provide primary supervision to externs. Credentialed clinicians from allied professions and non-staff psychology consultants provide supplemental training expertise. There are opportunities for additional supervisory consultation with psychologists working outside the extern's normal assignment area as well. Program faculty use various modes and models of supervision in the training of externs, including co-therapy, analysis of audiotaped or videotaped sessions, supervisor "shadowing," and "junior colleague." In all cases, externs work closely with supervisors initially, and then gradually function more independently as their skills develop. Responsibility for ensuring adequacy of supervision rests with the Program Training Committee, under the leadership of the Psychology Training Program Director.

Training Term

The externship training year is for a term of 9 to 12-months beginning in early Summer or Fall. Externs typically work two days a week, with most externs working an average of 16 - 20 hours per week. This length is consistent with the majority of other psychology externships in the United States and allows externs to compete competitively for internship placements. However, the exact nature of the training term and requirements will vary based on the placement. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has certainly altered the training landscape and clinical practice within the VAMHCS, to primarily include telehealth and telesupervision activities.

COVID-19 Impact on Training

The recent training years have given various insights that can help inform the potential impact of the post-pandemic phase on externship training. Recruitment and interviews will be conducted virtually using video and/or telephone platforms, such as Webex, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. The exact nature of clinical activities and practice will vary depending on the placement and should be clarified with your potential supervisors upon interviewing with them. Please be aware that changes can occur abruptly at times, and flexibility and ability to adapt to changes are highly valued qualities within our system.

We plan to offer both face-to-face and virtual clinical experiences for this coming training year. For any face-to-face clinical work, applicable VAMHCS guidelines related to personal protective equipment (PPE) should be followed. Additional clinic-specific safety precautions may also be implemented as needed to ensure the safety of trainees, staff, and our clients. For virtual clinical training experiences, this will be conducted virtually through VA-approved video or telephone platforms (e.g., VA Video Connect). In some instances, externs may be able to utilize equipment on-site at the VA based on the availability and suitability of your placement for on-site work. In all other instances, externs will be required to utilize personal equipment from the extern's home for these clinical activities such as a desktop or laptop computer, camera, headphones or speakers, microphone and a reliable internet connection. Externs will also be expected to have and maintain a suitable work environment for maintaining confidentiality, professionalism, and collaboration through safe working conditions.

There are also various considerations for our training program with respect to vaccinations. First, all staff and trainees will be required to obtain the influenza vaccination (i.e., a flu shot) as a condition of their employment/appointment. Various exemptions exist, such as obtaining medical documentation of a medical exemption or an exemption due to religious reasons. Documentation of the vaccination and/or exemption will be required to maintain employment/appointment. Second, all staff and trainees are required to obtain the COVID-19 vaccination as part of their appointment. The same exemptions described above for the influenza vaccination apply for exemptions related to the COVID-19 vaccination.

CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

Training Placement Overview

Training Placement	Location	Spots Available
Neuropsychology	Baltimore Annex	3
	Perry Point	2
Outpatient Mental Health Clinic	Baltimore	1
Neuropsychology/Health Psychology Combined	Baltimore Annex/Perry Point	1
Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Treatment	Baltimore	1
VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC)	Baltimore	1

Neuropsychology

The Neuropsychology Program adheres to training criteria and guidelines developed by Division 40 of the American Psychological Association, the Association of Externship Training in Clinical Neuropsychology, and the Houston Conference on Specialty Education and Training in Clinical Neuropsychology. Veterans with medical, neurological, and psychiatric disorders are referred from various clinics and units throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System for neuropsychological assessment. Diagnoses include neurodegenerative, neuropsychiatric, endocrine, infectious, seizure, and vascular disorders, as well as tumor and head trauma. We also see patients referred for war-related injuries and associated symptoms. Patients include individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and ages: a substantial number of patients are over 50, although we routinely see referrals as young as 22.

The Neuropsychology externship is structured for trainees who have already completed at least one neuropsychology or cognitive assessment-focused practicum. An extern that demonstrates the appropriate fit and skillset would be based at one of the following sites for their training year (typically two days a week). **Please note Baltimore Annex and Perry Point are considered separate placements when ranking practicum.** Applicants are encouraged to apply to both placements if they are interested in both opportunities:

1) **Baltimore Annex:** Externs conduct assessments primarily in the general outpatient clinic. After demonstrating efficiency in this setting and dependent on clinic needs, Annex externs may also have the opportunity to work in the fast-paced Interdisciplinary Team Cognitive Assessment Clinic (IDT CAC; located at the main Baltimore facility on Greene Street). IDT CAC trainees collaborate with medicine, pharmacy, and social work to diagnose neurocognitive disorders and provide feedback to older Veterans and their families within a single, half-day appointment.

2) **Perry Point:** Externs conduct assessments primarily in the mental health outpatient building in Perry Point, MD. In addition to outpatient assessments, Perry Point VA externs will have opportunities to conduct targeted, inpatient assessments within three psychiatric residential units serving Veterans with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, and housing needs. There may also be opportunities to shadow within the Community Living Centers (geriatric extended care and subacute rehabilitation).

Post-Pandemic Considerations: This externship is designed as a primarily in-person training experience, though there may be periodic telehealth assessment conducted from VA offices.

Neuropsychology Staff and Supervision: Clinical training is core to our service. Eight neuropsychologists serve in downtown Baltimore and three in Perry Point, providing diverse clinical expertise and learning opportunities. They join with additional neuropsychology staff from other sites within the VISN 5 (Veterans Integrated Services Network 5: VA Capitol Health Care Network) on Tuesdays 1:30-3:30pm for video-based group supervision of cognitive assessment and rehabilitation. Most Tuesdays, two trainees among our fellows, interns, and externs present a recent case for collaborative discussion. Two to three times a year, staff will instead present Neuropsychology Rounds on a single topic in depth, such as movement disorders, multiple sclerosis, or cancer. Trainees can also access numerous live webinars and weekly online Neurology Grand Rounds from the University of Maryland.

Neuropsychology Externship Coordinator:

Jeremy Carmasin, PhD, ABPP-CN: Dr. Carmasin earned his degree in clinical psychology from the University of Louisville, with research and clinical foci in geropsychology and neuropsychology. He completed his neuropsychology-focused internship at the Western New York VAMC, and his postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology at Dartmouth College / Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. His research interests include longitudinal assessment of memory and executive functions (particularly in clinically-normal and mild neurocognitive disorder populations), and subjective measures of cognitive change and successful aging. Along with other Neuropsychology Section staff, Dr. Carmasin supervises externs, interns, and postdoctoral fellows.

[Back to Training Placement Overview](#)

Outpatient Mental Health Clinic – Baltimore VA Medical Center

The Mental Health Clinic (MHC) is a multidisciplinary program that provides outpatient medical, psychiatric, and social work services. Veterans receive treatment for a variety of conditions including Anxiety Disorders, PTSD, Bipolar Disorder, and Depressive Disorders. Veterans who are eligible to receive psychology services through MHC can receive appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions to improve and maximize their quality of life and recovery process.

The main training goal of the MHC externship is to prepare externs to learn appropriate interventions in order to treat individuals with the broad range of psychological disorders typically encountered in a multi-disciplinary outpatient mental health clinic. MHC externs will have the opportunity to provide individual therapy using Cognitive Behavioral, Acceptance and

Commitment Therapy, Interpersonal Therapy, and other evidence-based treatments. There is also an opportunity for group therapy depending on space and availability. Externs also have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and application of several evidence-based psychotherapies, including Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT). Measurement-based treatment is emphasized, and externs are encouraged to incorporate assessment measures – such as the Beck Depression Inventory – II (BDI-II), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), and PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) –to evaluate treatment progress. The externship is a 10-16 hour a week position.

Dr. Joseph De Marco is a staff psychologist in the Mental Health Clinic. He earned his Psy.D. at Loyola University Maryland. He completed his pre-doctoral internship at the Coatesville VA Medical Center in Coatesville, PA and his fellowship at the Trauma Services Program at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in Hines, IL. Dr. De Marco provides both individual and group psychotherapy primarily utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). He has received extensive training in evidence-based practices (EBPs) for PTSD including Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for PTSD and Prolonged Exposure (PE) for PTSD. He is also trained in Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT) for nightmares and Motivational Interviewing (MI). Dr. De Marco’s clinical interests include trauma, exposure therapy, health psychology, mindfulness, diversity/multiculturalism, and supervision. He enjoys providing clinical supervision to externs and is excited to be part of VAMHCS psychology training program.

[Back to Training Placement Overview](#)

Neuropsychology/Health Psychology Combined – Baltimore Annex/Perry Point VA Medical Center

The VAMHCS Neuropsychology and Health Psychology Externship is appropriate for trainees who have at least 1-2 years of neuropsychological assessment experience as well as some treatment experience focused on chronic illness. An extern that is a good fit would be based at both the Baltimore Annex and Perry Point Campus (typically two days per week), with flexibility for telehealth (depending on supervisory approval).

The main goal of the Neuropsychology and Health Psychology externship is to give externs a varied experience and exposure to Veterans with medical/neurological and psychiatric disorders from various clinics throughout VA Maryland Health Care System. Experiences will include neuropsychological assessment and/or time-limited treatment focused on health management. Externs will receive training in conducting comprehensive neuropsychological evaluations for Veterans with acquired brain injuries and neurodegenerative, neuropsychiatric, and vascular disorders in outpatient consultation. For the health psychology aspect, externs will receive training in empirically based treatments, including Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and/or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), on an outpatient basis to Veterans with chronic health conditions, dealing with adjustment, depression, anxiety, insomnia, or medication adherence. Measurement-based care through the use of measures such as the Beck Depression Inventory – II (BDI-II), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), and PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) amongst others depending on the case is also

encouraged in order to track treatment progress. Depending on trainee interest, experiences for group therapy are also available. Veterans seen by both Neuropsychology and Health Psychology are individuals who come from a wide array of intersecting identities.

Externs will be strongly encouraged to join other neuropsychology trainees on Tuesdays 1:30-3:30pm for video-based supervision of cognitive assessment and rehabilitation. Most Tuesdays, two trainees among our fellows, interns, and externs present a recent case for collaborative discussion. Two to three times a year, staff will instead present Neuropsychology Rounds on a single topic in depth, such as movement disorders, multiple sclerosis, or cancer. If they are able, externs will also be encouraged to attend a monthly Health Psychology Didactic Seminar on the third Thursday of the month 3-4pm and gain exposure to various topics related to health psychology or lead a case presentation.

Dr. Antione Taylor is a staff Health and Neuropsychologist at VAMHCS. He also currently a member of the Internship Training Committee, serving as an Internship Seminar Co-Coordinator. He earned his Ph.D. in Human Services Psychology from the University of Maryland Baltimore County. He completed his rehabilitation psychology/neuropsychology focused internship at VA Boston and his postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology at MedStar National Rehab Hospital. His research interests focus on the social determinants of brain health inequities, in particular amongst the Black diaspora. Dr. Taylor currently supervises externs, interns and postdoctoral fellows, and has a passion for teaching and watching those he helps thrive. Outside of professional endeavors, Dr. Taylor enjoys cooking, foodie adventures, playing tennis, watching professional wrestling (yes he knows it's fake), playing video games, watching anime, and values time with his friends and family, all in the pursuit of joy.

Dr. Daniel Leibel earned his Ph.D. in Human Services Psychology (Clinical Psychology/Behavioral Medicine) from the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) and previously completed his Neuropsychology internship at VA Maryland. After completing his Neuropsychology fellowship at Johns Hopkins Medicine, Dr. Leibel was thrilled to return to the VAMHCS as a staff neuropsychologist at Perry Point. Since starting in August 2022, he has supervised externs and interns in neuropsychological assessment and intervention. As a general neuropsychologist, Dr. Leibel's clinical and research interests are broad and include dementia, epilepsy, movement disorders, multiple sclerosis, stroke and vascular disease, functional neurological disorders, and serious mental illness. Outside of professional endeavors, Dr. Leibel enjoys hiking, skiing, live music, board games, and quality time with friends, family, and especially his 2-year-old daughter.

[Back to Training Placement Overview](#)

Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Treatment– Baltimore VA Medical Center

The Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Treatment Externship takes place in an Integrative Recovery (IR) Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) of the Substance Use Disorders Treatment Programs at Baltimore. The IR IOP is a 12-16 week dual diagnosis program for Veterans with substance use disorders. The most commonly encountered substances of abuse include alcohol, heroin (opiates), and cocaine. Other presenting addictions include to benzodiazepines, marijuana, and prescription narcotics. The majority of this population is medicated for co-occurring psychiatric illness, including PTSD, depression, bipolar illness, and severe mental illness.

The main training goal of the IR-IOP externship is to prepare externs to learn appropriate interventions for the treatment of substance use disorders as well as co-occurring disorders such as PTSD, mood disorders, and other mental health concerns. Training and supervision will include various evidence-based psychotherapy modalities such as the fundamentals of Interpersonal Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

Externs will participate on an interdisciplinary treatment team and will co-facilitate group therapy two times weekly, co-facilitate 1-2 psychoeducation groups weekly, and carry individual patient caseloads. Each extern will also participate in weekly team meetings.

Dr. Candice Wanhatalo is a staff psychologist in the Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Treatment Program. Dr. Wanhatalo is also a current member of the Internship Training Committee, serving as the Coordinator of Diversity and Inclusion Training. She most recently served six years as a BHIP clinical team lead and staff psychologist in the Baltimore Mental Health Clinic. Prior to joining VAMHCS in April of 2018, she was a staff psychologist in the Mental Health Clinic at the Washington DCVAMC for ten years. During her ten years in DC, Dr. Wanhatalo was an active member of the training committee, served as supervisor to externs, interns and postdoctoral fellows. Her clinical interests include race-based stress and trauma and working with a variety of mental health concerns. She has completed additional training in evidence-based approaches such as CBT for Depression, CBT for Psychosis, CBT for Pain Management, Motivational Interviewing, and Interpersonal Therapy for Depression. She received her B.A. from the Pennsylvania State University (We Are!) and received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from George Mason University. She completed her internship in community mental health at the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board in Fairfax County, Virginia, where she served as mental health therapist for two years. Dr. Wanhatalo greatly enjoys working with externs and has been thrilled to see how her former trainees have progressed in their careers over time.

[Back to Training Placement Overview](#)

VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center – Baltimore VA Medical Center

This externship program is a joint effort between the Division of Psychology at the University of Maryland, School of Medicine and the VISN5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) at the Baltimore VAMC. There are a range of experiences for externs to get involved in, many with different on-site psychologist supervisors. Externs participate in several activities that will expose them to working with individuals with serious mental illness (SMI; which is my area of interest and the focus of the MIRECC). This externship provides clinical experiences across the range of settings that serve individual with SMI including community mental health clinics, inpatient treatment settings, and psychosocial rehabilitation programs, in both community and VA systems of care. For externs who have specific interests with different populations (e.g., early psychosis, primary care, inpatient treatment), I will work with them to find experiences. I meet with externs twice per month to review the full range of externship activities; externs meet weekly with on-site supervisors weekly for supervision specific to each experience.

Below are descriptions of clinical training experiences pursued by externs over the last few years. Note: Opportunities may change from one year to the next depending on the interests/work of the different supervisors and clinical programs.

1) Substance abuse treatment groups. Externs can train with Dr. Melanie Bennett to co-lead one of two types of substance abuse treatment groups for people with dual disorders: (1) Behavioral Treatment of Substance Abuse in Severe and Persistent Mental Illness (BTSAS, Bellack, Bennett, & Gearon, 2006) or (2) Behavioral Treatment of Smoking Cessation in SMI (Bennett, Dixon, and Bellack). Both are behavioral treatments for substance abuse in patients with schizophrenia and other serious mental illness that involve mastering an array of behavioral strategies for substance abuse, including motivational interviewing; goal setting and problem solving; administering a urinalysis or breath CO contingency program; conducting social skills and drug refusal skills training; providing education on psychotropic medications, drug/nicotine effects on the brain, and HIV; and training in relapse prevention skills. Groups take place in either outpatient community mental health centers, the Baltimore VAMC, or in community psychosocial rehabilitation programs. The patient population that is served by these interventions is severely impaired, both in terms of symptoms and years of illness and in terms of the many problems associated with their mental illness that they bring with them into the treatment setting. In addition, externs learn to establish rapport with this socially isolated population, as well as the concepts behind a behavioral intervention. Training is done by way of extensive reading, observation, and practice with weekly videotaped supervision to monitor progress and shape therapist skills. Externs serve as a co-therapist for one of these groups (groups meet twice per week), which in addition to administering the intervention involves tracking patients' participation in the program, scheduling follow-up assessments, and recording clinical data from the group sessions for analysis.

Externs have done smoking cessation groups in inpatient, outpatient, and rehabilitation settings, as well as in primary care and with the VA's targeted SMI-Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT), a team within primary Care that specifically serves Veterans with serious mental illness.

2) Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia. Externs are trained in Social Skills Training for patients with severe and persistent mental illness, a behavioral approach for rehabilitation of schizophrenia patients that has been successfully employed with a wide variety of patients for the past 25-years. SST is a highly structured educational procedure that employs instruction, modeling, role-playing, and social reinforcement. Complex social repertoires, such as making friends and refusing substances are broken down into component elements such as maintaining eye contact and providing social reinforcers. Patients are first taught to perform the elements, and then gradually learn to smoothly combine them. There is a strong emphasis on behavioral rehearsal and over-learning of a few specific and relatively narrow skills that can be used automatically, thereby minimizing the cognitive load for decision making during stressful interactions. Training is done in a small group format by two therapists, and externs co-lead a social skills training group for veterans with severe and persistent mental illness at the Baltimore VA Medical Center.

3) Ready, Set, Grow. Externs can co-lead *Ready, Set, Grow*, a goal-setting group designed to help individuals with serious mental illness think about changes they want to make and prepare to make them. This group is provided at the Baltimore VAMC, Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center and is supervised by Dr. Elizabeth Klingaman.

4) Illness Management and Recovery (IMR). Externs can co-lead an IMR group at the Baltimore VAMC, Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center. IMR is an evidence-based intervention designed for individuals with serious mental illness. IMR groups run weekly for 45-minutes and focus on different aspects of illness (e.g., mental health symptoms) and recovery (e.g., coping skills, relapse prevention). Groups typically involve 4-8 veteran members and a psychology fellow co-leader. This experienced is supervised by Dr. Clare Gibson.

5) Behavioral skills training groups on psychiatric inpatient units. Any of these groups can be implemented at the Baltimore VAMC inpatient psychiatric unit. Inpatient experiences are supervised by Dr. Jason Peer.

6) There are often opportunities to provide individual, behaviorally oriented therapy or to conduct psychodiagnostic and cognitive assessments with Veterans with SMI at the Baltimore VAMC, Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center. Supervisors will differ depending on the need and area of focus.

7) Externs can be trained on several measures of social functioning, treatment use and motivation to change substance abuse, in order to assist in conducting baseline assessments of patients in our substance abuse treatment studies. Measures include the Addiction Severity Index, the Social Functioning Scale, and the Brief Quality of Life Inventory.

8) Externs have the opportunity to work on a research project and to present a poster at the Department of Psychiatry Research Day in May, write a paper, present a workshop at a local meeting, etc. Externs are introduced to the various projects going on at the Center for the Behavioral Treatment of Schizophrenia (CBTS) and are able to select a topic that interests them.

9) Externs are invited to attend and participate in any trainings that occur for clinical staff. Examples include: Motivational Interviewing, CBT for Insomnia, Living Well (a medical illness management protocol for people with SMI).

Dr. Melanie Bennett, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Psychiatry
University of Maryland School of Medicine
Research Health Scientist, VA Maryland Health Care System
Director, Education Core, VISN 5 MIRECC
Director, VISN 5 MIRECC Advanced Fellowship

[Back to Training Placement Overview](#)

Didactic Opportunities

Diversity Seminar Series

The Mental Health Clinical Center offers a monthly diversity seminar, which is focused on topics that enhance extern's understanding of cultural competence within clinical and research applications. Topics are a blend of didactic material and experiential exercises, designed to enhance intra/interpersonal awareness, knowledge, and practical skills. Topics typically include military culture, disabilities, LGBTQI, race and privilege, spirituality, and microaggressions.

The objectives for the diversity seminar are to:

- provide an atmosphere in which externs and supervisors can explore themselves, their worldviews, and the worldviews of others, and how these beliefs might impact clinical work, scientific research, or professional development
- increase externs' awareness and understanding of cultural factors in diagnostic and therapeutic processes, and the research environment
- broaden externs' effectiveness in counseling and researching persons with diverse characteristics

Additional Didactic Opportunities

There may be a number of intensive trainings and consultation groups in evidenced-based treatments that are offered to program externs. These include, but are not limited to: Social Skills Training, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Motivational Interviewing. Most trainings involve a formal workshop that is facilitated by a regional or national trainer which may be followed by a consultation group to assist in implementation of the treatment modality.

The VA Talent Management System offers many other educational opportunities that may be accessed at the VA or at home. Examples include the Advanced Family Topics Seminar, multi-module training for the Clinician Administered Scale for PTSD and Cognitive Processing Therapy, Women's Mental Health, Geriatrics and Extended Care, Military Sexual Trauma webinars.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicant Eligibility

1. Applicants must be trainees in good standing in an APA-accredited doctoral program in clinical, counseling, or school psychology and approved for externship by their graduate program Training Director.
2. Externs must be citizens of the United States and must present documentation of U.S. Citizenship prior to beginning the externship. The VA is unable to consider applications from anyone who is not currently a U.S. citizen. Verification of citizenship is required following selection. All externs must complete a Certification of Citizenship in the United States prior to beginning VA training. Applicants who were noted as male on their birth certificate, regardless of current gender, must have registered with the Selective Service System by age 26 (and provide proof of registration) to be eligible for any US government employment, including selection as a VA trainee.
3. Externs are subject to fingerprinting, employee health physical screening, verification of educational credentials, and background checks. Selection decisions are contingent on passing these screens.
4. The VA conducts drug screening on randomly selected personnel. Externs are not required to be tested prior to beginning work, but after beginning a placement, are subject to random selection.
5. Additional requirements for all VA trainees are included at the following link: <https://www.va.gov/oa/hpt-eligibility.asp> This information will need to be verified by completing a Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter (TQCVL) with your Graduate Program Director of Clinical Training at the time of selection.
6. Please review the specific requirements associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic ([COVID-19 Impact on Training](#)) on page 5, which outlines requirements for personal equipment and suitable work environment for virtual clinical work and documentation of influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations and/or exemptions.

Application Procedures

1. All applications materials must be submitted electronically to the Psychology Externship Program Coordinator, Dr. Jennifer Lorenzo, at Jennifer.lorenzo2@va.gov. When naming files, please use the following convention: YOUR LAST NAME_NAME OF FILE (e.g., LORENZO_VAMHCS Cover Letter). Application materials should include the following:
 - a. A cover letter, **which clearly indicates** the placements for which you would like to be considered. Please detail your specific reasons for choosing the supervisor and/or practicum placement in which you are interested. This is your opportunity to help present yourself favorably to your prospective supervisors and will help them determine whether to offer you an interview. Applicants may copy and paste the checklist provided below in their cover letter and rank order the practicum opportunities listed (i.e., 1, 2, and 3). Please do not rank more than three practicum opportunities and you are not required to rank three placements.

Rank	Name of Placement
1	
2	
3	

- b. An updated curriculum vita.

2. A *letter of readiness* sent directly from the applicant's Director of Clinical Training. This letter should briefly describe your standing in your program, approval from your DCT or program to apply for practicum, and any other salient information your DCT may wish to include that may impact your practicum placement. Please note that *letters of recommendation* are not required.
3. Complete applications will be forwarded to respective Externship Clinical Supervisors for review.
4. Applicants invited for an interview will be contacted directly by the respective Externship Clinical Supervisors.
5. Externship Clinical Supervisors may make an informal offer to applicants. The Externship Coordinator will contact the applicant to make the formal offer.
6. **The deadline for submission of applications is Thursday, February 1, 2024.** Please note that applications received after this date are not guaranteed to be reviewed. However, individual supervisors may continue to review applications received after the deadline for any unfilled positions, at their discretion.

Selection Procedures

A separate committee of externship training staff from each track reviews and evaluates each application on the domains of clinical and assessment experience, quality of graduate program, coursework and grades, life experiences, and goodness of fit with the training program. Each program decides which applicants will be invited for interviews in late February and early March. Decisions regarding interviews are communicated via email.

Contact Information

Please visit our Training Program website at:

<https://www.va.gov/maryland-health-care/programs/mental-health-clinical-center-psychology-training-program/>

Requests for additional information about the VAMHCS Psychology Externship Program may be obtained via email (preferred) or telephone from the following individuals:

Primary Contact:

Jennifer Lorenzo, Ph.D.

Psychology Externship Coordinator

443-421-5768

Jennifer.Lorenzo2@va.gov

Secondary Contact:

Moira Dux, Ph.D.

Psychology Training Program Director

443-421-5922

Moira.Dux@va.gov