

VA



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

Doctoral Practicum in Psychology Training Program 2024-2025

VA Illiana Health Care System

Mental Health Service (116)

1900 East Main Street

Danville, IL 61832

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

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

Patricia J. Smithmyer, Psy.D.

Phone: (217) 554-4605

Email: Patricia.Smithmyer@va.gov

Psychology Setting

About the VA Illiana Health Care System:

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



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



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



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

About the VA Illiana Psychology Service:

The Psychology Service at VA Illiana includes 25 doctoral-level psychologists. The broad range of expertise, background, and experience represented in the staff is also reflected in the diversity of their professional assignments throughout the Healthcare System. Psychologists work in traditional outpatient and inpatient mental health and rehabilitation settings, as well as in neuropsychology, substance abuse recovery, and health psychology specialties such as primary care, pain management, health prevention and disease prevention, home based health care, and both outpatient and residential geriatric care.

Program Description:

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

Eligibility:

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

Application and Selection Procedures:

Applicants to the VA Illiana Psychology Practicum Training Program should send the following in an email to Patricia.Smithmyer@va.gov:

- A letter of interest that includes:
 - The time frame for which placement is sought (e.g. Fall semester, Spring semester, or both), including specific dates if possible
 - Days of the week anticipated to be available for practicum
 - Number of hours anticipated to be available on site

- Any training program requirements for successful practicum completion (e.g. number of hours, required direct service hours, etc.)
- Any deadlines the applicant may have with regard to interviewing and/or making a final decision regarding practicum placement
- Updated CV
- Graduate transcripts (Unofficial is acceptable)
- Training Program DCT letter of approval – this can be a brief email noting that the applicant is in good standing and approved for an advanced practicum placement

Practicum applications are due **March 15th** of each year. Practicum student applications are reviewed by a panel of psychologists involved in practicum training. Applicants may seek consideration for one or multiple clinical areas but must specify their order of preference if requesting to be considered for multiple areas. Interviews are conducted mid-March after the APPIC match has been finalized for the next year’s placement, as practicum availability is predicated to some degree on the placements of the incoming intern class. Offers will be made to selected practicum students within 2 weeks of the conclusion of interviews, typically the end of March.

VA Illiana Practicum Placement Options 2024-2025

Geropsychology – Community Living Center (CLC)

Supervisor: Dr. Carmen Tyler

Description: In this placement, students will have the opportunity to work with older adults receiving inpatient care through the Geriatrics & Rehabilitation Service. Training experiences will be largely serving the short-stay and long-stay Veterans residing in the CLC and Veteran’s Village homes. Students will receive exposure to numerous specialty areas, including Memory Care/Dementia Specialization, Palliative Care, Mental Health Recovery/Geropsychiatry, Physical Rehabilitation, and Long-Term Care. Students may have opportunities to lead cognitive stimulation groups and providing support to caregivers.

Students will develop and refine their intervention and assessment skills with an aging population (Veterans over the age of 60). Veterans will have varied presentations that include comorbid psychological, neurocognitive, and physical needs. Students will have opportunities to utilize behavior, reminiscence, meaning-centered, and cognitive stimulation therapies in both individual and group formats. Students will conduct psychological and cognitive evaluations to assess for mood symptomology, decision-making capacity, and behavior management planning. Students will receive training in an evidence-based behavior management program, and will have the opportunity to provide education to staff on individualized behavioral interventions and implementation of these plans. Students will work closely with multidisciplinary teams to provide collaborative and Veteran-centered care.

Outpatient PTSD Clinic

Supervisors: Dr. Katie Keil, Dr. Chelsey Siville, and Dr. Charlene Johnson

Description: Practicum applicants should have strong generalist clinical skills and a desire to develop specialized competency in treating trauma. Trainees will learn to evaluate referrals to the

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

Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PCMHI)

Supervisors: Dr. Brandy Mysliwicz

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

Students in this placement function as interdisciplinary team members across all eight primary care teams and Urgent Care Clinic to assist the primary care physician (PCP), nurses, social workers, nutritionists, and pharmacists in managing the overall health of Veterans. The intern's role in this placement is to provide:

- Brief (30-minute) functional assessments with feedback reported directly to the referring provider.
- Triaging to appropriate specialty mental health clinics.
- Individual short-term, problem/solution-focused, behavioral activation, and/or goal-setting interventions targeted to reduce symptoms, improve health, and increase quality of life.

The basic treatment approach is based on brief patient interactions that focus on self-management of the presenting problems. Treatment typically involves addressing presenting problems such as mental health issues that can be treated in 4-6 sessions, including: mild to moderate depression, anxiety, PTSD (psychoeducation), adjustment disorders, bereavement/grief, relationship/marital concern, and diagnoses where the patient is having trouble coping with a psychosocial stressor. Additionally, behavioral health concerns will be treated such as: adjustment to medical condition, wellness interventions, sleep disturbance, sexuality, stress, tobacco use cessation, substance misuse, relapse prevention, weight management, chronic illness management, diabetes management, and difficulty with adherence to medical regimens. Treatment interventions are

brief, evidence-based, educational/skills-based in nature, and emphasize practice and home-management. Interventions may include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), Problem Solving Therapy (PST), or stress management. Referrals are generated from warm handoffs, formal and informal consultations, and positive screens on depression, alcohol, PTSD measures, etc. that are conducted by nursing during the Veteran's primary care visit.

Outpatient Mental Health Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)

Clinic Locations: Peoria, IL, and Springfield, IL

Supervisors: Dr. David Weidner; Dr. Ashley Shenberger

Description: Students at the CBOCs will learn the role of the psychologist in an outpatient community setting while interacting with professionals from many other disciplines including, Primary Care, Audiology, Nursing, and Nutrition. Opportunities include: learning about evidenced based psychotherapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, the Unified Protocol, Cognitive Processing Therapy, & Prolonged Exposure; collaborating with a Nutritionist while implementing Stanford University's pain management curriculum; learning about the Home-Based Primary Care Psychology program; and participating in the VA's Progressive Tinnitus Management program in collaboration with an Audiologist. Due to the distance from the Danville location, there are limited in-person options for full rotations at a CBOC clinic; however, training experiences at these locations are possible.