

# Psychology Externship Program

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System  
Brooklyn Campus

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES HANDBOOK**

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Dear Psychology Externship Applicant:

In the pages ahead you will be learning about our externship training program. We wish to first provide you with some updated additional information about COVID-19 and adaptations to our training program.

As a hospital training program located in New York City, VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, Brooklyn Campus has been acutely aware of the personal and professional challenges presented by COVID-19 on our trainees and staff.

***Transition to Telework, Telehealth, and Changes in Application Admission Requirements***

With the support of medical center leadership, beginning in March 2020, we successfully transitioned all supervising psychologists and trainees to telework and made adaptations very quickly. Specifically, externs continued to conduct diagnostic interviews, individual therapy, and group therapy sessions over telehealth; and externs have received individual and group supervision over virtual media technologies. Externs have benefitted from live, direct observation of clinical care by supervising psychologists. At present, our supervising psychologists are on site three days a week and are teleworking two days a week. We have also similarly moved our externship program to a hybrid model as of Fall of 2022 with externs having the opportunity to work on-site and telework. We plan to continue working in this hybrid model for the foreseeable future.

***Our Commitment to Training and Supervision***

Despite the aforementioned modifications, we remain steadfast in our commitment to training and supervision. Going forward, while we cannot definitively predict how specific rotations or adjunctive training opportunities may evolve for 2024/2025 training year, we do know with certainty that there will continue to be more overall utilization in telehealth and technology-based delivery platforms. This presents a unique opportunity for our externs to receive in-depth training in tele-mental treatment.

***Externship Interviews***

It goes without saying that the health and safety of our Psychology Trainees, along with the competent care of our nation's veterans, is of utmost importance to us. At present, we plan to continue to conduct interviews virtually and will notify interested applicants should that change. Our program will continue to provide high quality training in professional psychology while simultaneously keeping our trainees' health and wellness at the forefront.

If you have questions you may contact our Co-Directors of the Externship via email or phone: Julija Stelmokas, Ph.D., [Julija.stelmokas@va.gov](mailto:Julija.stelmokas@va.gov), and Wing Jin Mak, Psy.D., [Wing.mak@va.gov](mailto:Wing.mak@va.gov), 347-244-5900. Our program is always happy to answer any questions that may help you decide to apply to our site.

Sincerely,

Julija Stelmokas, Ph.D.  
Externship Program Co-Director

Wing Jin Mak, Psy.D.  
Externship Program Co-Director

VA, New York Harbor Healthcare System, Brooklyn Campus

## OVERVIEW

The psychology externship program of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Brooklyn campus provides students with a clinically intense learning experience that includes individual and group psychotherapy as well as seminars and experiential group experiences. Veterans at our facility are coping with a wide variety of difficulties including substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, grief and loss, depression, anxiety, personality disorders, family relationships, anger management, and chronic pain, among other difficulties. Our externship program has been a mutually positive experience for both externs and staff. It encourages professional growth and hopes to provide externs with a training experience that enables them to discover their own style as a clinician. Major extern responsibilities include individual psychotherapy and group psychotherapy. Externs who run groups will also have the opportunity to participate in a supervision group in which they are supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist on their group psychotherapy experiences. Externs will also participate in an extern process group facilitated by an outside consultant. In addition, externs attend weekly didactics/seminars covering a variety of topics. They also have opportunity to attend Mental Health department Grand Rounds. The externship year runs from September through May and is two days per week with Friday being a required day for the Brooklyn campus positions. Some clinic assignments require attendance on other days due to the nature of the nature and extend through the summer. Possible clinic area assignments are listed below.

\*\*In the first paragraph of your cover letter, please rank up to two clinic area assignments in which you are interested.\*\*

### **Substance Use Disorders (SUDS) Rotation**

*Supervisors: Melissa Magnotti, Ph.D.*

Externs on the SUDS rotation will provide individual and group psychotherapy to patients struggling with mild to severe addiction, as well as patients in recovery. Externs also do intakes and learn to assess substance use, apply interventions specific to substance use issues, and learn when and how to make referrals to a higher level of care (for example, inpatient rehab).

Most patients have a history of trauma or other stressors and often their use is an attempt to cope with such things. Externs will learn how to work with patients to address their use as well as the issues that may underlie them. Some concepts externs will learn about in their clinical work include motivational interviewing, recovery, harm reduction, working with relapse, dynamics of defenses in substance use, and the AA meeting model. The group experience of this rotation right now is a process-oriented therapy group for Vietnam veterans with combat related PTSD. There may also be an opportunity to start a second group focused on patients struggling with addiction.

There may also be an additional opportunity to participate in an interdisciplinary, NY Harbor-wide committee that discusses cases of veterans who need special care plans to address their disruptive behavior in the hospital. Often this disruptive behavior is related to substance use. This is a unique opportunity to experience the role of a psychologist as the administrative lead of a nationally defined, cross-campus committee, and to work collaboratively with other departments within the larger NY Harbor Healthcare system. It also provides the opportunity to learn how a psychologist's role can make an important impact at not only the individual patient level, but to the larger hospital community. This would be as schedules and interests allow.

### **Biofeedback Clinic/Outpatient Psychotherapy Rotation**

*Supervisor: Amy Malkin-Ingoglia, Ph.D.*

Biofeedback is a psychophysiological therapy in which patients are connected to sensors that give feedback about physiological activity and reactions (e.g., heart rate, muscle tension, respiration rate) in real-time. This information can be used to help patients recognize, understand, and ultimately change their patterns of fight or flight response. Biofeedback is used to help patients with a number of issues such as chronic pain, insomnia, and anxiety. In this rotation, externs will complete intake assessments for biofeedback patients, teach patients mindfulness skills to prepare them for biofeedback work, and learn how to use biofeedback in a clinical setting. In addition to a biofeedback caseload, externs can also carry a small caseload of more traditional psychotherapy cases (CBT or psychodynamic). This rotation is well-suited for an advanced extern who is interested in health psychology/behavioral medicine. Please note that this rotation is on Wednesdays and Fridays and requires the extern to be on-site both days.

### **Staten Island CBOC Mental Health Externship**

*Supervisor: Vivian Mancino, Ph.D*

Externs will have the opportunity to provide individual psychotherapy to a diverse population of veterans struggling with a myriad of issues including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression and Anxiety. Externs will be located one day in the Staten Island Community VA Clinic and one day remote. Externs will receive supervision in the provision of short-term evidence-based treatments.

### **Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC)**

*Supervisors: Daniel Feld, Psy.D., Katelyn Zmigrodski, Psy.D*

Externs working in the PRRC have the opportunity to provide a full range of psychological services in a milieu therapy program to veterans who require intensive mental health treatment. Currently, there are approximately 20-25 veterans enrolled in the program diagnosed with a wide range of mental health problems within the severe range pathology, including combat-related PTSD, schizophrenia / other psychotic disorders, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, high risk/suicidality, and personality disorders secondary to another diagnosis. Many of the veterans in the PRRC also have co-morbid medical problems. As such, the PRRC focuses on a holistic model of care that addresses all aspects of the veterans' lives, including mental health, physical health, and multicultural identities. Veterans enrolled in the PRRC attend group programming, which includes psychotherapy groups, music therapy, recreational therapy, peer led groups, and health education groups. We are currently open in-person Monday through Thursdays, and virtual only on Fridays. Externs on this rotation are involved in conducting initial screenings and assessments, carrying a caseload of 4-7 individual cases, co-facilitating and leading various groups (psychoeducational, skills based, and process groups).. Externs on this rotation also have the opportunity to work on an interdisciplinary team with psychologists, a social worker, a clinical nurse specialist, a creative arts therapist, a recreational therapist, a peer specialist, and psychology interns/extern, as well trainees from other disciplines. Externs will learn about the recovery model of care and, specifically, how to build upon each veteran's strengths and work collaboratively towards their treatment goals.

The PRRC rotation runs from September to May with options to start early or extend. Given the rotation requires 2.5 days, students who can commit to 20 hours/week are encouraged to apply.

## **Military Sexual Trauma (MST)**

*Supervisor: Shalini Sehgal, Psy.D.*

Military Sexual Trauma or MST is the term used by the VA to refer to experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment that a veteran experienced during his or her military service. Externs conduct comprehensive psychological intakes and carry a caseload of individual psychotherapy with survivors of MST. As MST is an experience and not a diagnosis, an Extern can expect to see a wide range of mental health issues. Referrals for MST Consultation come from a variety of sources, including primary care physicians, primary care mental health, veteran self-referrals, and other mental health clinicians. Externs on this rotation acquire knowledge and skills in working with shame, self-blame, anger/impulse control, impaired affect, and dissociative symptoms. Externs are expected to work in collaboration with other medical professionals, particularly psychiatry. Externs may also co-facilitate *Trauma Information Group*, utilizing a combined relational and psychoeducational group treatment protocol for sexual trauma survivors. Externs may have the opportunity to engage in hospital-wide staff education and training related to MST. Externs are also involved in Sexual Assault Awareness month activities, including planning and participation in the annual MST Clothesline Project.

## **Community Mental Health and Psychoanalytically Informed Group and Individual Psychotherapy Outpatient Services at St. Alban's MH/BHIP**

*Supervisor: Annie Lee Jones, Ph.D.*

Externs will have wide exposure to an ethnically and racially diverse population of veterans who are from the local community and the nearby NYS Nursing Home. They present with a broad spectrum of mental health issues complicated by developmental, social, and economic issues in addition to combat experiences. Childhood and other types of traumatic experiences may also present themselves. The extern will provide individual and group psychotherapy to this population, focusing on the development of relational skills and strategies for behavioral changes in their personal lives.

This rotation is 16 hours a week. The St. Albans campus is easily accessible via the Long Island Rail: 30 minutes from Penn Station, Grand Central, or Atlantic Terminal, as well as MTA train and bus services. Currently the MTA bus that services the St. Albans Campus is free of charge.

## **Combined MST and Psychology Outpatient Rotation**

*Supervisor: Elaine Lavin, Psy.D.*

Externs on this rotation will spend approximately half their time seeing a general outpatient population with a range of mental health issues, and half their time focused on Military Sexual Trauma. In addition to these two outpatient components, interested students will have the option to dip their toe into geropsychology with one or two patients in the St. Albans Community Living Center (nursing home). Patients will be drawn from the St. Albans campus in Eastern Queens and present with a range of issues including PTSD, depression, anxiety, relationship concerns, and adjusting to life transitions. The extern will see these patients for individual therapy, which may include both short-term treatment and cases that last the duration of the training year. The extern may also co-lead a drop-in DBT skills group. Military Sexual Trauma or MST is the term used by the VA to refer to experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment that a veteran experienced during their military service. As MST is an experience and not a diagnosis, an Extern can expect to see a wide range of mental health issues in this part of the rotation as well. Externs will see MST survivors

for individual psychotherapy. They may also co-facilitate Trauma Information Group, utilizing a combined relational and psychoeducational group treatment protocol for sexual trauma survivors. Externs can expect to acquire knowledge and skills in working with shame, self-blame, anger/impulse control, impaired affect, and dissociative symptoms from their clinical work in both halves of this rotation. This rotation is 20 hours a week with Tuesdays or Wednesdays at the Brooklyn campus, Thursdays at St. Albans, and Fridays remote. The St. Albans campus is easily accessible via the Long Island Rail: 30 minutes from Penn Station, Grand Central, or Atlantic Terminal.

### **Outpatient Neuropsychology**

*Supervisor: Julija Stelmokas, Psy.D., ABPP-CN with additional supervision and coverage by Valerie Abel, Psy.D., ABPP.*

Neuropsychological assessment can assist in diagnostic clarification and prediction of long-term outcomes. A neuropsychological evaluation can be a therapeutic experience whereby patients and their family members can increase their understanding of symptoms and identify treatment options that can improve their quality of life. The extern will have the opportunity to complete biopsychosocial interviews, administer/score/interpret results from neuropsychological tests using a fixed-flexible battery, utilize other psychodiagnostic instruments (e.g., structured clinical interviews, MMPI), and write reports that are tailored for multiple audiences within a fast-paced, multidisciplinary hospital setting. The extern will work with a variety of conditions such as mild cognitive impairment and dementia, neuromedical disorders, chronic health disease, and other neuropsychiatric presentations (e.g., polytrauma). The extern will gain knowledge and skills in delivering effective and patient-centered feedback to Veterans and other stakeholders (e.g., family members, consulting providers). Formal training in delivering feedback will be provided. There is also an opportunity to develop a “mini rotation” to increase competencies in delivering neuropsychological interventions (i.e., cognitive rehabilitation, post-feedback adherence) and deliver neuropsychological services within co-located models (e.g., geriatric primary care) depending on the extern’s interest and training goals. A competency and strength-based approach to supervision will be utilized with a focus on building necessary skills towards culturally humble and inclusive practice.

Although externs pursuing a variety of career pathways are welcome to apply, preference will be given towards those seeking clinical neuropsychology specialization. All clinical evaluations will be expected to be completed on site and face to face.

### **Palliative Care/Oncology**

*Supervisor: Sabrina Esbitt, Ph.D..*

The palliative care/oncology practicum slot will allow psychology trainees to gain unique clinical experiences working with veterans and caregivers followed by our interprofessional palliative care team, veterans receiving renal dialysis, and in our hematology/oncology service. Assessment and psychotherapy for psychosocial issues that affect veterans and families dealing with life-threatening illness or end-of-life are key components of this rotation. Externs will have the opportunity to work with veterans and families on an outpatient basis, as well as bedside and during treatment (chemotherapy or renal dialysis). Brief cognitive and mental/behavioral health assessments are utilized to clarify diagnosis, better understand capacity for medical decision-making, and to treatment plan. Adjustment to illness, loss, disability, caregiver stress, demoralization, challenges

with loss of meaning, trauma and stage-of-life transitions are common. Evidence-based interventions are highlighted as well as opportunities to participate in interprofessional team meetings. Depending on referrals and extern interest, there may be opportunities to conduct comprehensive mental health evaluations for candidacy for kidney transplant or for spinal cord stimulator implant.

## **POLICIES REGULATING THE PSYCHOLOGY EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

### **A. STRUCTURE OF EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

The Psychology Externship Training Program is structured to provide an integrated and coordinated approach to training. Training is considered a responsibility of every staff member who is included in some function of the program.

1. The Psychology Externship Program is under the administration of the Department of Mental Health, Psychology Section and is administered by the Chief of Psychology and Assistant Chief of Psychology/Training Director. The Psychology Training Committee is composed of Chief of Psychology, Assistant Chief of Psychology/Training Director, supervisors, and staff psychologists.
2. The Externship Training Committee regulates the policies and procedures of the externship program. Individual supervisors are responsible for interviewing and selecting externs. The Training Committee is responsible for reviewing and evaluating externs' progress and certifies successful completion of the externship program.
3. The Externship Training Committee oversees the development and evaluation of clinical and didactic experiences for the externs.
4. Through regularly scheduled meetings, the Externship Training Committee engages in periodic review of the program to ensure that the philosophy, objectives and procedures of the program are adequately addressed.

### **B. APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR PSYCHOLOGY EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

The Training Committee follows the guidelines set by the Psychology Internship Directors of New York State and New York/New Jersey Association of Directors of Training.

1. Please submit applications through the NYNJADOT-PSYDNYS EXTERNSHIP portal only: ([nynjadot.apa.org](http://nynjadot.apa.org)).
2. Applications are solicited and received by the Externship Directors. Rotation supervisors review applications, contact applicants directly, and interview applicants. Interviews will be held between January 24th, 2024 – February 29th, 2024.
3. The application materials consist of: Curriculum Vitae, a letter of readiness from the applicant's program, two letters of recommendation, and graduate transcripts. Please include all materials in one PDF file. If your recommender prefer to send the letter of recommendation directly to us, please email it to [wing.mak@va.gov](mailto:wing.mak@va.gov).

4. A personal interview with a staff psychologist is required of each applicant.

### **C. ADMISSION PROCEDURE**

Applicants are screened based on VA policy. They must be enrolled in an APA approved doctoral program in clinical or counseling psychology. Applicants who are U.S. citizens, documented immigrants, non-immigrants, or exchange visitors are all welcome to apply. You can check here [Am I Eligible? Checklist for VA HPTs](#) to learn more. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, all VA employees including externs, are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and will be asked to provide proof of vaccination. Exceptions for medical or religious reasons can be requested.

### **D. TRAINING ASSIGNMENTS**

The program of training is designed to train externs as generalists through immersion in clinical work and careful supervision. Externs are assigned to one clinical area for the duration of the externship training year. Each of these clinical areas may require the extern to be present on specific days, with Fridays being required for all externs for didactics, and process group facilitated by an outside consultant, and group for group supervision for those externs participating in a clinical group experience.

### **E. SUPERVISION**

Supervision is viewed as a process of learning about the treatment of patients and oneself in relation to them. Externs and supervisors work closely together. These relationships are a critical element in the training process.

1. Supervision takes a number of forms: 1-hour weekly individual supervision, 1-hour weekly group-for-group supervision, 1-hour weekly didactics
2. At least one hour of individual supervision is provided weekly for each rotation, however, some rotations will provide more than 1-hour of individual supervision.
3. Supervisors must have a doctoral degree in psychology from an APA approved institution and have completed an APA approved internship. They must also have State Certification.
4. Externs will participate in a weekly process-group which is facilitated by an outside consultant. This space is provided to externs to process their experience in a confidential space. The consultant does not disclose any information from the process group to the Externship Training Committee.

### **F. SCHEDULES**

The training program is scheduled to provide a comprehensive experience that focuses on training requirements while being sensitive to individual needs of externs and program constraints.



1. The training program requires a minimum of 500 hours to be completed within the academic year, September through May, with some exceptions for externs to stay until September depending on rotation and supervisor.
2. The externship is two days weekly, with Friday being a required day. The standard 8-hour workday being is 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. At the start of the workday, externs must email their supervisors to inform them that they are signing in and to email their supervisors at the end of the day to let them know they are signing out.
3. We expect that externship is your main priority during the days you are with us, whether that is working remotely or on-site. If there are circumstances which may interfere with your ability to perform your responsibilities (e.g. outside employment, personal issues, health problems, school/dissertation issues), please discuss it with your direct supervisor as well as with the Training Directors.
4. Some rotations may require attendance on specific days or on an additional half-day. Additionally, some rotations may require a full-year training experience.
5. Externs are allowed 11 days off for vacation or illness through May. There are 11 Federal holidays that count toward these days off if they should fall on a scheduled externship day. This is to ensure that externs are meeting the required 500 hour minimum. Additional leave will be prorated if the externship extends past May. If an externs rotation extends through the summer, they are given one day per leave for each month extended past May. When days are taken off, the extern must notify their supervisor in advance and arrange coverage for patients. If an extern is sick, they must notify their supervisor as soon as possible and arrange for patient notification or coverage. Externs and supervisors should keep track of requested leave.

Monday, September 2, 2024: Labor Day  
Monday, October 14, 2024: Indigenous Peoples Day  
Monday, November 10, 2024: Veterans Day  
Thursday, November 28, 2024: Thanksgiving Day  
Wednesday, December 25, 2024: Christmas Day  
Wednesday, January 1, 2025: New Year's Day  
Monday, January 20, 2025: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday  
Monday, February 17, 2025: Presidents Day  
Monday, May 26, 2025: Memorial Day  
Thursday, June 19, 2025: Juneteenth National Independence Day

## **G. PSYCHODIAGNOSTIC TESTING**

Testing is not a formal component of the externship, but may be available on a case-by-case basis depending on clinical area and supervisor.

## **H. COMPUTER ACCESS**

Externs are given access to computers which are equipped with software to perform word processing, data analysis, electronic mail systems, Internet access, and the hospital-wide recordkeeping system (CPRS). Externs are expected to utilize the CPRS for all medical record charting and to follow standard procedures regarding maintaining confidentiality of patients' medical records.

## **I. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality of client contacts and records must be cautiously maintained.

1. Psychologists follow the procedures of confidentiality as outlined in the American Psychological Association's publication "Ethical Principles of Psychologists."
2. On units where a team approach is employed, matters received in confidence by a psychologist may and must be extended to the other members of the therapeutic team. When this occurs, the confidentiality is equally binding on all members of the team.
3. Confidential material should never be released to individuals or agencies outside the hospital except through those channels legally established by the hospital and then only after obtaining a written release from the patient. All correspondence concerning patients must be approved by the supervising psychologist and released through the Correspondence Office.
4. Temptations to share clinical experiences with colleagues in inappropriate settings (e.g. elevators) should be resisted, even if names are not used.
5. If sessions are to be taped for supervisory purposes, patients are to be so informed and consent granted. A progress note should indicate that the patient has agreed to tape. Tapes must be carefully guarded and locked and must never be taken out of the medical center. Tapes must be erased after being used in the next supervisory session.
6. Discretion, professional judgment and supervisory guidance should all be used in deciding how much detail needs to be put in a patient's chart. In 1996 the US Dept. of Health and Human Services released guidelines (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act—HIPAA) on patient confidentiality and charting. The VA respects and practices these guidelines.

## **J. Scheduling Rooms**

In order to see patients in person, a private office will need to be used. There are a number of office space available for externs to use. We have also created a shared Microsoft Excel sheet so you can all see what rooms are available when and can reserve rooms for your therapy sessions. Please note that this is a living document that can be updated and changed at any time, and should be updated as offices become available or unavailable. This also helps people to know who is using what office and on what day. After you use the room, be sure to leave it how you found it and then lock the door unless arranged with the staff member. Please also be sure to put the key back at the shared extern office so others can access it.

## **PSYCHOLOGY EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM SUPERVISORS**

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