

# **Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System**

## **Externship Opportunities**

Below are several externship opportunities offered at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) for the 2024-2025 training year. If an applicant has more than one interest, please state this in the application. Training hours per week are negotiable. Applications are due **Monday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 2024**. A 2-3 month onboarding time is required should an applicant be selected. Start date is generally the 4<sup>th</sup> week of July.

If you are interested in being considered for any of the externship placements, please contact Christopher Parkinson, Ph.D., ABPP via email ([Christopher.Parkinson@va.gov](mailto:Christopher.Parkinson@va.gov)) and include a letter of interest indicating desired placement(s) and a current CV. Additionally, please have your Director of Training complete the externship readiness form and submit to Dr. Parkinson directly.

Thank you for your interest in the SLVHCS externship program!

1. **Health Psychology & Behavioral Medicine** (New Orleans: 2 positions)  
(Baton Rouge: 1 position)

**Supervisor(s):** Emily Ibert, Ph.D.; Christopher R. L. Parkinson, Ph.D., ABPP; Royce Butler, Ph.D., & Tracy Protti, Ph.D.

**Availability:** Full Academic Year

**Hours:** 4 – 20 hours per week

In health psychology and behavioral medicine, externs function as consultants on the psychosocial and behavioral aspects of disease expression, control, and prevention in addition to providing brief, solution-focused behavioral health treatment for adjustment issues and less severe mental illness.

- **Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (1 Position)**
  - Brief solution-focused treatment for depression, anxiety, and adjustment issues
  - Health coaching for health promotion & disease prevention utilizing motivational interviewing
  - Treatment of chronic pain and anger management in primary care setting
- **Interdisciplinary Palliative Care (1 Position)**
  - Assessment of psychological and cognitive functioning in the context of an interdisciplinary team
  - Individual therapy to address adjustment to disease, symptom management, and transition to end-of-life
  - Experience with providing consultation to other health professionals
- **Interdisciplinary Pain Psychology (1 Position)**
  - Assessment of psychological factors in chronic pain conditions within an interdisciplinary team

- Interdisciplinary group therapy to address chronic pain and associated psychological factors and individual therapy for complex chronic pain cases
- Consultation within an integrated pain management team

Full Academic Year (New Orleans):

Trainees applying for a position in New Orleans have the opportunity to obtain experiences in **primary care-mental health integration (PCHMI)** with **Dr. Ibert** (50%) and **interdisciplinary palliative care** with **Dr. Parkinson** (50%). Alternatively, trainees can apply to work 100% in **interdisciplinary pain psychology** with **Dr. Protti**.

Full Academic Year (Baton Rouge):

Trainees applying in Baton Rouge will obtain experience in **PCMHI** with **Dr. Butler**.

2. **Integrated Inpatient and Outpatient Treatment** (New Orleans: 1 position)

**Supervisors:** Chelsea Ennis, Ph.D.; Taylor Nocera, Ph.D.; Desirae Vidaurri, & Ph.D.; Jessica Walton, Ph.D.

**Availability:** Full Academic Year

**Hours:** 16 – 24 hours per week (Minimum two days per week)

Externs working within this rotation will have the opportunity to work in both outpatient and inpatient settings at SLVHCS.

Inpatient Mental Health:

With Veterans admitted to inpatient mental health, the emphasis is placed on adapting empirically supported treatments for short-term delivery. The focus of training will be on learning a modular approach to flexibly apply evidence-based treatments, particularly from a cognitive behavioral perspective, to a broad range of diagnoses. Trainees will gain experience in assessment, and brief individual & group psychotherapy in the acute setting.

- Leading or co-leading group therapy, tailoring empirically supported treatments, particularly from a cognitive behavioral perspective
- Exposure to cognitive behavioral therapies, including Dialectical Behavior Therapy and other complementary treatments such as Motivational Interviewing
- Collaboration with other mental health professionals, such as psychiatry, pharmacy, social work, and nursing, within an integrated team

Outpatient Mental Health (PTSD Clinic):

Externs will work with Veterans diagnosed with Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The diagnosis of PTSD may stem from military and/or non-military experiences and may be complex in nature (e.g., repeated exposure to multiple types of stressors). Externs will work with Veterans from all combat eras, including Vietnam, ODS, and OEF/OIF/OND. Trainees will conduct comprehensive intake evaluations and will routinely administer structured and semi-structured clinical interviews (e.g., SCID-5, CAPS-5) to aid in differential diagnosis. This training experience will also focus on providing evidence-based psychotherapies (EBPs).

- PTSD EBPs: Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Written Exposure Therapy (WET)
- Additional EBPs: Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT for nightmares), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)

3. **Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)** (Baton Rouge: 1 position)  
(Slidell: 1 position)

**Supervisor(s)**: William “Bill” Schmitz Jr., Psy.D.; Meghan Borne, Crystal Tillis, Ph.D.; & Ph.D.;  
Dustin Seidler, Ph.D.

**Availability**: Full Academic Year

**Hours**: 4 – 20 hours per week

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) is comprised of a primary medical facility in New Orleans and 7 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC). CBOCs function to provide medical and mental health care to Veterans, typically in more rural areas of our system. As CBOCs are located further from the main campus, trainees will typically see a wide-range of presenting concerns. Trainees will have the opportunity to work in our Baton Rouge clinic with **Dr. Bill Schmitz**, **Dr. Meghan Borne** and **Dr. Crystal Tillis** or our Slidell clinic with **Dr. Dustin Seidler**.

**Baton Rouge CBOC:**

- Conduct initial evaluations for Veterans seeking outpatient treatment
- Develop skills in case formulation, differential diagnosis, and treatment planning
- Administration of psychological assessments for diagnostic clarification and assessment of treatment effectiveness
- Evidence-based treatments for individuals and groups (behavioral activation for depression, PTSD, ACT, pain management, insomnia, CAMS, etc.)
- Consultation and collaboration with primary and specialty care providers for psychological intervention and behavioral management of medical concerns
- Coordination of comprehensive mental health services (e.g. substance abuse, homeless program etc.) within context of multidisciplinary team

**Slidell CBOC:**

- This externship placement emphasizes the development of skills needed to integrate psychological services within interdisciplinary treatment teams in rural or suburban medical contexts. Major components of this placement include:
  - Brief evaluation and treatment of clinical and health psychology problems;
  - Triage decision-making to prioritize service delivery; consultation and collaboration with primary care providers for psychological and medical management;
  - Psychological assessment, individual and group psychotherapy;
  - Referral to specialty mental health programs, and coordination of care with the onsite psychiatrist/mental health staff.

- Working within the framework of the Ambulatory Mental Health Clinic (AMH), the mental health staff at the Slidell CBOC provide comprehensive mental health services to Veterans suffering from issues related to anxiety, mood, personality, adjustment, grief, and psychosis. Externs will conduct initial evaluations for Veterans seeking treatment, which will develop abilities in case formulation, differential diagnosis, and treatment planning. Externs will administer psychological assessments for diagnostic clarification and treatment planning purposes, as well as provide brief, short-term behavioral interventions to improve health and daily functioning. Clinical writing skills will be developed throughout the rotation. Externs will provide evidence-based psychotherapy to Veterans and participate in group therapy (observing or co-facilitating depending on ability level).

4. **Ambulatory Mental Health (AMH) Clinic** (New Orleans: 1 position)

**Supervisor:** Allison Dornbach-Bender, Ph.D.

**Availability:** Full Academic Year

**Hours:** 8 – 20 hours per week

**AMH Clinic:**

The Ambulatory Mental Health (AMH) clinic provides outpatient mental health services to Veterans of various backgrounds, ages, and military service. In AMH, multidisciplinary staff care for Veterans presenting with various mental health concerns and disorders including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, PTSD, personality disorders, insomnia, adjustment disorders, and grief. Trainees will gain experience in assessment, group psychotherapy, and individual psychotherapy. Emphasis will be placed on the provision of evidence-based psychotherapies (EBPs).

- **Individual Therapy:** Externs will have the opportunity to provide treatments such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for Depression, CBT for Panic Disorder, Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Written Exposure Therapy (WET), and Prolonged Exposure (PE).
- **Group Therapy:** Externs will have the opportunity to cofacilitate groups led by Dr. Dornbach-Bender (e.g., CBT for Depression group, transdiagnostic CBT for Anxiety group, Dialectical Behavior Therapy skills group).
- **Assessment and Treatment Planning:** AMH intakes involve conducting a thorough psychosocial history, suicide risk assessment, semi-structured interview (i.e., SCID-5), and self-report measures. Following the intake, externs will assign diagnoses and conduct treatment planning with the Veteran.

5. **Research** (New Orleans/Remote: 1 position)

**Supervisors: Joseph W. Boffa, Ph.D.; Claire Houtsma, Ph.D.; Amanda M. Raines, Ph.D.; & Mary Shapiro, Ph.D.**

**Availability: Full Academic Year**

**Hours: 8 hours per week**

Externs may participate in a research rotation within SLVHCS's Psychology Service. Students may work with one or all of the aforementioned supervisors. Activities while on the rotation may include but are not limited to: 1) data entry and management; 2) administering research protocol to Veteran participants; 3) supervised peer-review for scientific journals; 4) secondary data analysis; and 5) manuscript preparation for co-authorship. Below you will find information about each supervisors area of research interest.

**Dr. Boffa's** research focuses on cognitive-affective variables that intersect PTSD and suicide risk as well as the development of novel interventions to target these conditions.

**Dr. Houtsma's** research focuses on suicidal behavior, with three related areas of emphasis – the role of firearms in suicide, capability for suicide, and sociocultural influences on suicide risk. Dr. Houtsma is interested both in understanding risk factors for suicide and developing scalable, Veteran-led interventions to prevent suicide.

**Dr. Raines's** research focuses on identifying and empirically examining transdiagnostic risk and maintenance factors (e.g., anxiety sensitivity), as well as the development of novel interventions that can be used to treat and prevent anxiety and related pathology including PTSD, suicide, and substance use.

**Dr. Shapiro's** research focuses on the intersection of traumatic stress and reproductive health, as well as developing technology-assisted treatment approaches to address symptoms of anxiety- and trauma-related conditions.

6. **Suicide Prevention** (New Orleans: 1 position)

**Supervisor: Dian Evans, JD, Ph.D., MSCP**

**Availability: Full Academic Year**

**Hours: 8 hours per week**

The Suicide Prevention team works closely with mental health and healthcare providers throughout SLVHCS to coordinate care for Veterans deemed high risk for suicide. This includes managing the high-risk list to ensure that Veterans are being seen within the high-risk protocol guidelines; following-up with Veterans in the SLVHCS catchment area who have reached out to the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL); and consulting with providers on complex cases where suicide risk is a concern. Suicide Prevention team members act as consultants on protocols and procedures related to suicide prevention and investigate reports of patient suicides. Externs will learn from the VA's nationally recognized "best practices" in suicide prevention, working alongside the suicide prevention staff with Veterans determined to be at high risk for suicide. Specific training opportunities include:

- Responding to consults placed by the VCL to provide follow-up care to Veterans in crisis

- Working with Veterans on the high risk for suicide list to assess risk and ensure continuity of care
- Conducting brief therapy with high-risk patients
- Assisting in the completion of a root cause analysis related to patient suicides for presentation to VA leadership