

# **Clinical Training in Practicum Settings**

## **Clinical Program, School of Psychology**

### **Overview of Clinical Training**

Clinical training at the School of Psychology is overseen by the Coordinator of Practica & Internships (CPI). The first practicum is typically assigned at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> year in the program (typically over the summer). The first practicum takes place at the in-house training clinic, the Centre for Psychological Services and Research (CPSR). Students continue the CPSR practicum for the required number of psychological assessments (2) and intervention cases (3). Some students may be required to complete additional cases.

External practicum placements start in March of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the program and are subject to satisfactory practicum evaluations at CPSR. External clinical practica vary in content and other parameters (e.g., number of placements) depending on the desired competencies and training objectives of the student as well as training needs of the student and requirements of the program (e.g., remediation, readiness for internship). Normally, students complete practica in a) a hospital setting; b) a private practice setting; c) a practicum that is assessment focused; and d) a practicum assigned to provide depth or breadth in training depending on the student's internship and career objectives, and the training plan.

Internship readiness is vetted by the CPI, approved at the Clinical Program annual review of the student in the year they wish to apply (normally 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year in the program) and formally confirmed by the CPI and Director of the Clinical Program in the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) application for internships (AAPI).

### **Overall Management and Planning of Clinical Training**

The CPI meets regularly with all students in the Clinical Program. This begins with a group orientation meeting in Year 1 (April or May), followed by practicum coordination meetings with each student individually to develop their personal Clinical Training Plan. This meeting typically takes place in November of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the program to prepare for the assignment of the first external clinical practicum (March).

Beginning in Year 2, and thereafter until a student starts internship, the CPI meets students individually to assist them with external practicum selection and pre-internship planning. In Years 2 and 3, the emphasis of practicum training is on attaining foundational knowledge and skills; in Years 4 and 5, the focus is on tailoring the clinical training experiences in order to achieve the student's particular clinical training objectives (both for internship applications and subsequent career goals).

### **The Individualized Clinical Training Plan**

The CPI, in consultation with each student, develops individualized clinical training plans. Although the main element in developing the training plan is the student's career interest, it also

involves monitoring academic progress and program requirements (including courses and thesis research progress). The Clinical Program works actively with students to ensure appropriate workload balance to promote timely completion of clinical training, program requirements, and the thesis. Given that internship/residency settings have the general expectation that the thesis be functionally completed prior to internship/residency, this dimension receives considerable attention in coordination and planning activities in all years of a student's progression through the Clinical Program (see Program Sequence for Student: <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/psychology/programs/clinical-psychology/program-guidance-current-students>).

A student's clinical training plan is composed of several broad components, including type of clinical populations served, lifespan factors (child/adolescent/family/adult/couples/older adult), and type of service (community consultation/forensic<sup>1</sup>/health psychology/sex therapy/mental health/neuropsychology<sup>1</sup>). Across these components, there are both foundational and focal competencies to be attained at the pre-internship and the internship levels in all clinical activities (assessment/diagnosis/consultation/treatment). All of these elements inform the development of a clinical training plan that ensures the student will be competitive for the type of internship that is congruent with the student's career goals. Bearing this training plan in mind, and taking into account student preferences and career plans, the CPI is responsible for assigning students to external practicum sites.

The internship/residency application year receives dedicated attention during the meetings with the CPI. As well as continuing to meet with students individually during this period, for each internship applicant cohort, the CPI holds three group meetings, beginning in the spring of the application year. These meetings address (a) the specifics of the APPIC standard application form (AAPI) and the APPIC/NMS Match, (b) student questions about the application form and the application process, and (c) aspects of preparing for internship interviews and ranking of internship sites.

### **The Clinical Training Community**

The clinical program provides a very wide range of practicum training opportunities, offered in over 20 external settings. Over the years, those responsible for the administration of the clinical program have worked diligently to develop good working relationships with the psychologists at external sites offering practicum training. The program is fortunate to be situated in a region with a large number of professional colleagues and settings committed to clinical training. External settings must either be a facility with a CPA accredited internship or meet the training requirements outlined in the program document entitled "Criteria and Procedures for Approval of External Practicum and Internship Training Settings" (<https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/psychology/programs/policies-regulations/criteria-procedures>).

There is considerable diversity in the organization of clinical training across the sites in the National Capital Region approved for external practicum training. Larger settings typically offer multiple rotations in different service areas, whereas smaller settings may have only one or two clinical training foci. For example, in a recent placement period, there were a total of 48 placements within the 22 different approved settings. In consultation with the CPI, each setting

determines the level of practicum training it can offer (basic, intermediate, advanced), the number of practicum students it can take, any special knowledge/skill prerequisites beyond those generally required by the clinical program, and the duration of the placement. Each setting agrees to respect the supervision criteria established by the School of Psychology as reflected in the policy for approval of external training settings.

The CPI hosts two group meetings per year with the Psychology Training Directors/Coordinators from all settings approved by the School of Psychology for external practicum training. These meetings address various training topics and developments in the profession. This is supplemented by individual site-specific meetings as required to address questions that are site-specific. The Director/Coordinator also works with new settings being considered as potential sites for clinical training in order to ensure that they meet program requirements in line with CPA accreditation criteria.

The bilingualism which characterizes the University of Ottawa clinical psychology program does present a challenge in the planning of practicum training. Students typically receive most of their practicum training in the language of the training stream to which they were admitted (i.e., French or English). Some students, however, request to complete practicum training in both languages. At the two practicum sites on campus (i.e., Centre for Psychological Services and Research and the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services), training opportunities are available in both languages. Among the more than 20 external practicum settings, approximately half are unilingual or predominantly English, slightly less than half are bilingual, and the remaining settings are unilingual or predominantly French. Within the bilingual settings, there are typically more opportunities for English language training than for French language training, as not every placement/rotation can provide support for French language services and training.

### **Centre for Psychological Services and Research**

As described above, all students complete a portion of their practicum training in the School of Psychology's on-campus training site, the Centre for Psychological Services and Research (CPSR). This is typically identified as the "internal practicum," and provides an opportunity for core clinical faculty to be directly involved in the clinical training of students. Within CPSR, supervision is provided by clinical faculty members and community-based colleagues.

The internal practicum (indicated on student transcripts as PSY 6007) begins in the summer of the first year in the program and is typically completed by the fourth year in the program. The amount of time devoted to the CPSR practicum varies, depending on the particular student's clinical training plan (e.g., child /family or adult/couples; mental health or health psychology). In recent years, the time range has been 450-750 total hours. The Director of CPSR and the Director's assistants assigns clinical cases and supervisors to practicum students and is responsible for the overall monitoring of student progress at CPSR.

Practicum training at CPSR combines direct service and supervision with complementary activities offered by the program, including case conferences, a seminar on clinical supervision (taken in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year), and access to recordings of demonstration cases by faculty members. CPSR practicum training emphasizes mastery of foundational professional knowledge and skills.

The training is designed to be generalist in nature, as students are exposed to diverse approaches, modalities, and populations. Students may also request focal opportunities for additional training in program evaluation beyond that required by the clinical program focused on Community consultation. This element is provided in collaboration with School of Psychology clinical faculty who are associated with the Centre for Research on Education and Community Services.

Following completion of the internal practicum, a small number of students pursue supplementary specialized training (e.g., community consultation, additional sexual health or couple therapy) at CPSR (indicated on student transcripts as PSY 6009). There is no certainty that such training can be provided to any particular student and planning for a student's clinical training plan should not assume its availability. This dimension is a lower priority for CPSR resource allocation than the core practicum and the internship. When it occurs, it will likely involve seeing 1-2 additional CPSR clients within an approximate one-year period.

### **External Practica**

For most students, practicum training in external settings begins in Year 2, and for all students by Year 3 (indicated on student transcripts as PSY 6008) until the student begins an internship. This clinical training is increasingly oriented to enable students to obtain the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the specific type of internship to which they will apply. In addition to the CPSR practicum, the typical student completes 4-5 external practica. Practica are assigned for 6 and 12 months and may start in March and/or September. However, school board practica often run September (or March)-June.

Students accumulate 1 credit on their transcript for each 30 hours of practicum training. Although a minimum of 750 hours of supervised clinical training is the current minimum program requirement, in order to be competitive for the internship application process, all students significantly surpass this. The typical range for students who secured an internship varies *significantly* depending on student training plans and year of application; in recent years the range of total hours were approximately 1,500-2,500 hours (including 350-850 hours of direct client contact and 200-500 hours of clinical supervision). Approximately 25% of all practicum hours are completed at CPSR, with the majority of clinical training attained in external practicum sites.

Students who wish to participate in clinical practicum placements need, at all times, have a complete health and safety file with the Office of Risk Management. A public health nurse assigned to the psychology program assists students in managing their files. Students need to complete the requirements outlined here: <https://orm.uottawa.ca/clinical-placement/deadlines#phd-clinical-psychology>

Some training settings may require additional preparation (e.g., non-violent crisis intervention certification, N-95 mask fitting, etc.). Students are responsible to complete these requirements prior to the start of their clinical practicum. Additionally, it is becoming common for settings to require that students have their own professional liability insurance. Accordingly, all students are regularly advised about the importance of obtaining and maintaining such insurance.

General management of clinical training occurs throughout the year. Students will keep track of their training hours using the software Time-2-Track (a paid subscription provided by the School

of Psychology). For the CPI, the planning and procedure for each period of external practicum training and the assignment of students to specific practica occurs within two blocks of time: May–June and November–January. Twice a year (May and November), all students are asked to confirm whether they wish to be considered for the next placement period. Similarly, settings are asked to identify the practicum training opportunities they will be able to offer for the next training period (September–February) or (March–August) or for a 12-months period. Most settings or rotations within a setting operate for longer than six months. For planning purposes, the intent is to announce practicum assignments to both students and settings by mid-January and mid-June, for training commencing in March and in September, respectively. In some settings, the assignment is only confirmed once the student has met with the setting’s Psychology Training Director/Coordinator and designated supervisor of the setting/rotation.

For the planning of, and assignment to, external practicum settings, the CPI works with two Assistant Coordinators (who are CPSR interns who complete this activity as their Management/Consultation internship rotation). The CPI and the Assistant Coordinators function as a team throughout the external practicum planning and assignment period.

Once students have confirmed their wish to be considered for an external practicum and settings have provided their inventory of opportunities, the CPI and Assistant Coordinators work through multiple iterations of practicum assignments to achieve the best match possible for each student. In doing this, the following elements are considered:

- (1) proximity to applying for internship (i.e., students applying in the current internship application year are given highest priority for September placements, and students applying during the next internship application year are given highest priority for March placements; second year students are given the lowest priority for both periods, and students in the intervening years are given medium level priority for both periods);
- (2) students’ individual clinical training plans are an integral part of every stage of the planning/assignment process;
- (3) the first two factors are matched with available opportunities (and the requirements specified by the settings for each placement/rotation) offered by external settings for each placement period;
- (4) all students’ individual clinical training plans must be considered in assigning practicum settings. At times, this may result in a small number of students receiving assignments that are not as directly pertinent for their clinical training plans but which will still provide valuable clinical experience.

Although there is some predictability in terms of which training opportunities are available on a regular basis, there is no certainty of a particular opportunity for any placement period. For example, a specific health psychology rotation in a teaching hospital offered each of the last two placement periods may not be offered subsequently for one year or more. Similarly, the same rotation may be offered but the type of student may be different from one period to the next (e.g., junior student previously, now limited to senior students with defined additional requirements). This variability is typically due to setting-related changes, whether in type of clientele served, the type of services provided, and supervisor availability.

In closing, it is evident that the diversity that characterizes our generalist clinical psychology program, together with a large number of different settings contributing to students' clinical training, makes for a rich and robust training environment. This also creates challenges for planning clinical training and for tailoring training, as much as possible, to students' clinical training plans. It is important, therefore, that students are aware that internship competitiveness is not determined by the presence or absence of any single practicum opportunity (or a set number of direct clinical hours). Rather, competitiveness is determined by the aggregate of pre-internship clinical training and competencies, knowledge, skills, and professionalism developed over the entire training period in both internal and external training settings.

Elke Reissing, Ph.D., C.Psych.; Coordinator of Practica and Internships  
Sophie Lebel, Ph.D., C.Psych., Elisa Romano, Ph.D., C.Psych.; Clinical Program Co-Directors  
Andrea Ashbaugh, Ph.D., C.Psych.; Director, Centre for Psychological Services and Research

June 2022