

Readiness for Internship

The process of applying for internship involves multiple steps, and when students decide that they intend to apply for internship, they will be guided through these steps by the Coordinator of Practica and Internships. The internship applications process is very competitive and each year in Canada and the United States there are more applicants than there are internships. It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the University of Ottawa clinical psychology program has consistently had a high success rate in the annual Internship Match.

There is no single “best” profile to be competitive for internship selection. Internships vary considerably in the types of training they offer and no internship is intended to meet the training needs of all students who are applying in a particular year. Hence, “goodness of fit” is a vital component in making selection decisions. Goodness of fit is largely about congruence between what an internship setting offers and an applicant’s prior training and career goals.

The purpose of this document is to assist students in being as prepared as possible to be competitive in the internship application process. To this end, we will highlight the milestones students should have achieved prior to beginning the application process. We will address course work, dissertation progress, and practicum training. Our comments are applicable whether you are applying in your fifth year (to be on internship in your sixth year) or in your sixth year (to be on internship in your seventh year). We encourage you to keep in mind that, for most students, the University and the School provides a maximum of five years of financial support. There are certainly important financial considerations involved in planning to be on internship in the sixth year, as all accredited internships provide an annual stipend to interns. For some students, though, it may be preferable to plan to be on internship in the seventh year—this may be the case for students wishing to develop a stronger research profile or for those seeking to apply to specialized internship sites. If this is the case for you, please keep in mind that you are likely to be facing the prospect of having little or no funding in the sixth year.

Course Work

We suggest that students plan to complete their coursework no later than the Fall term of the year in which they are applying for internship. Although most internships allow for courses to be completed in the Fall term or Winter term of the application year, a small number of internship sites set an earlier period (either the Fall term of the application year or completed prior to application). Of course, as suggested in the program document on course selection, you should ensure that you select your courses with your internship and future career goals in mind. For many internship sites, having both relevant course work and practicum training are important elements of a competitive application.

Dissertation Progress

In recent years, internship sites have become increasingly specific with respect to the dissertation progress applicants must have made prior to commencing internship. In some cases, internship sites are looking for evidence that applicants will, at a minimum, have completed all data collection and analysis prior to commencing internship. For an increasing number of sites, there is an expectation that students will have a draft of the entire dissertation completed prior to commencing internship. For this reason, students should be well-advanced on their dissertation prior to applying for internship. Of course, this requires considerable planning on the part of the student. Accordingly, we encourage students to work with thesis supervisors throughout all years of the program to ensure that

the dissertation is sufficiently advanced to allow for a timely internship application. Unless the dissertation is sufficiently advanced, students may face the necessity of delaying their internship applications for a year. If you have any questions about this, we encourage you to discuss them with the Program Director or the Coordinator of Practica and Internships.

Practicum Training

Internship selection (or match) by internship sites is determined by evaluating several factors. One is how applicants describe themselves in the essays that are part of the application submission. Another key element is the pre-internship clinical training that a student has received. Virtually all internships value and expect students to have strong skills in assessment/diagnosis and treatment. The foundations for these components are laid in initial clinical practica and can be acquired in a broad range of settings. This element is typically achieved in the second and third years of the program. In upper years, students begin to develop a more personalized profile explicitly designed to achieve congruence with the type of internship and internship setting for which they wish to be competitive. Some settings also want interns to have prior consultation and program evaluation experience. In our program, this component can be acquired in basic, intermediate, or advanced practica.

All students will do part of their pre-internship clinical training in the School's Centre for Psychological Services and Research, beginning at the end of 1st year and continuing through 3rd or 4th year. External practica usually begin in 2nd year but not later than 3rd year. Although the modal external practicum is of 6 months duration, with a 1.5-2 days per week frequency, there is considerable variability across practica. Hence, the total number of external practica will also vary across students, although most students will likely do 4-6 external practica. It is important to realize that, although the total number of practicum hours is not the key element for internship selection, it usually takes 1,600-1,800 hours to achieve the clinical experience that makes for a competitive profile. The optimal balance of assessment, treatment, and other experience again varies according to the type of profile being pursued.

Because congruence and profile development is so important, each student's clinical training program is generated and monitored through an ongoing process of collaboration between the student and the Coordinator of Practica and Internships (CPI). This begins with group meetings in 1st year and continues with further group meetings and individual meetings with the CPI in 2nd year and beyond. The Clinical Program Director and the CPI work closely to harmonize academic and clinical training activities.

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