

Clinical Psychology Externship Program at Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute

Overview of the Hospital

Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute (NVMHI) is a 134(140)-bed, accredited, inpatient state psychiatric hospital with a mission of "actively promoting the recovery of individuals with serious mental illness through the use of safe, efficient, and effective services." Located in Falls Church, Virginia, NVMHI provides adult inpatient services to the communities of Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William. NVMHI serves voluntary and involuntarily committed civil individuals, as well as individuals with a forensic legal status including those adjudicated Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity. NVMHI is proud to be a teaching hospital with a culturally diverse staff that infuses the recovery model of care into all aspects of treatment. Clinical departments include psychology, psychiatry, social work, primary care, nursing, dietary services, certified peer specialists, religious/spiritual programming, educational services, and occupational, expressive, and recreational therapies.

Overview of the Psychology Department

The Psychology Department at NVMHI has an active role in meeting the facility's mission, and in doing so provides a full range of assessment, treatment, and consultative services. Psychologists function as core members of interdisciplinary treatment teams, and in addition to managing psychology-related unit responsibilities, also provide individual and group therapies, behavioral consultation, psychological assessment, and supervision of psychology externs. The department currently has ten doctoral-level psychology positions, a Director of Psychology and Forensic Administration, and two Administrative Assistants. As psychologists, we seek to fulfill our role to the facility and to the profession by promoting quality care by way of evidence-based treatments and best practices, and through providing quality training for future psychologists.

Overview of the Externship Program

The externship program at NVMHI provides generalist training in the field of clinical psychology, with exposure to an acute and chronically severe inpatient population of diverse adults. Typically, two to three extern positions are available each training year (the nine month, academic year of September through May). Students are eligible, with approval of both NVMHI and the respective graduate program, to extend the training year to encompass up to 12 months total duration. Externs are required to participate in two 8-hour days per week of on-site training; one of the training days must be Wednesday. Externs work closely with assigned supervisors to identify training goals, develop clinical skills, and further their professional growth. Throughout the year, externs acquire training and exposure to civil and forensic populations/services within the hospital. Externs serve in a training role, alongside supervising psychologists, on various interdisciplinary treatment teams and participate in weekly patient rounds and treatment planning meetings. Externs also maintain a caseload of individual therapy, co-lead psychotherapy groups with a staff psychologist (with the chance to develop and facilitate a group on their own), and complete comprehensive psychological assessments. Additional training opportunities are available throughout the year, in the form of grand rounds and clinical case conferences.

Supervision

Supervision is an essential part of the externship training program. NVMHI meets the supervision expectations required of most accredited doctoral programs, which includes at minimum, two hours of weekly supervision, one of which must be conducted in a 1:1 setting with a licensed clinical psychologist. Externs at our site consistently accrue supervision hours far above these minimum requirements, and all supervision is provided by clinical psychologists. Externs will receive clinical supervision for the following areas: individual therapy, group therapy, and psychological assessment. Unit supervision will also be provided by the psychologist with whom the extern is working as part of an interdisciplinary treatment team. Programmatic/administrative supervision with a training coordinator is provided, on at least a monthly basis.

Additional Information/Resources

The externship begins during the week of Labor Day each year. Externs are required to complete hospital and clinical orientations, and various online policy courses at the outset of the training. Externs are excused from training on all government holidays. There is a shared, locked office space for externs, which can be used to

complete work projects and secure personal items. Office equipment includes a computer, a telephone with voicemail, office supplies, and furniture. Each extern will receive a government issued e-mail address, an employee identification badge, and necessary keys.

Applicant Qualifications and Application Process

The externship program is designed for doctoral students seeking a broad-based, inpatient training experience. Preferred applicants will have successfully completed at least one graduate-level externship and have interests in inpatient and/or forensic settings. Please note that an active contract must be in place between NVMHI and the university/graduate school in order to be given consideration during the application process. If a contract is not in place and you are interested, please notify the Director of Clinical Training at your respective program, as well as the NVMHI Training Coordinators via the contact information below. We typically accept two externs per year.

Applications are due Friday, January 29, 2027

Complete applications are required for consideration and should include the following:

- Cover Letter;
- Curriculum Vitae;
- One letter of recommendation, preferably from a clinical supervisor; and
- A de-identified psychological evaluation including integrated test results (an assessment is preferred but if one is not available another de-identified clinical writing sample is permissible).

If mailing, please send materials to:

Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute
Attention: Dr. Asia Sykes-Fernando
3302 Gallows Road
Falls Church, VA 22042-3398

Emailed applications are accepted as long as scanned signatures are included.

Asia.Sykes-Fernando@dbhds.virginia.gov

NVMHI participates in Uniform Notification Day, which is Friday, March 5, 2027 this year.

Due to the clinical nature of externship positions, selected applicants will be required to complete routine fingerprinting and drug testing through the Human Resources Department at NVMHI prior to beginning externship. There may be a cost associated with these services, due from the student/school; specific information will be provided to students in the initial letter of selection sent after Uniform Notification Day.

Please contact the NVMHI Clinical Psychology Externship Training Coordinator with any questions:

Asia Sykes-Fernando, Psy.D., M.S.
Email: Asia.Sykes-Fernando@dbhds.virginia.gov
Phone: 703-217-1477