

## **Academic Internships in Psychology: A Guide For Students Southwestern University**

### What is an academic internship?

An *internship* is an opportunity to gain field experience involving “real-world” applications of knowledge from a given discipline. An *academic internship* combines this opportunity with the completion of academic work designed to help students maximize their learning experience.

### What are the initial steps I need to take if I wish to conduct an academic internship?

Consider your goals for completing an academic internship, your area of interest (potential type of internship), and your desired timing (capstone internships are predominantly conducted during the summer following the junior year).

### How do I go about selecting a specific internship site?

After giving some thought to the issue of how an internship can meet your goals and the type of internship desired, you should schedule a meeting with a potential faculty supervisor. Most internships are supervised by Dr. Neighbors, but if your interests lie outside the areas of mental health or forensic psychology, you should approach the faculty member whose expertise most closely matches your interest (i.e., Dr. Giuliano in social psychology, Dr. Guarraci in neuroscience, or Dr. Crockett in health psychology). The faculty supervisor will discuss your interests and help you identify an appropriate internship site. Historically, most sites involve the areas of mental health or forensic psychology, but examples of other types of sites include trial consulting firms and advertising agencies.

A list of “established” internship sites (i.e., those that have previously accepted SU students) can be found at the end of this document. These established sites represent a variety of available opportunities, but many students choose to seek out sites beyond this list. Doing so requires that the student conduct sufficient information gathering so as to allow the faculty supervisor to evaluate the proposed internship based on the criteria outlined below.

When you know that you want to conduct an academic internship, submit via email to your intended faculty supervisor your intent to conduct an internship, and include your interest area and any specific sites you are considering. For summer internships this should be done prior to March 1<sup>st</sup>. When you have a firm idea of a specific internship site where you would like to work, submit the electronic application form (found on the internship webpage) to the faculty supervisor. This application requires specific information about the internship site, the site supervisor, and a description of the duties and responsibilities involved in the internship. For summer internships, this should be done prior to March 31<sup>st</sup> (earlier is better).

### What criteria must a potential internship site meet?

The primary criterion for a psychology internship is that the experience will meet important student needs. Thus, students are encouraged to give careful consideration to their future goals and to the question, “How can an internship help me meet my goals?” For many students, an important internship function is to help them make decisions about their career path. For others, it is to provide needed experience in the application of psychological principles to real world problems. It is hoped that this experience will both increase students’ competitiveness for graduate school or jobs and reduce the difficulty of the transition into these arenas. Ideally, an internship will serve all of these functions for students, but because each student is developing interests in different areas, internships must be evaluated individually in terms of their ability to serve these functions for a given student.

The second criterion is that the activities involved in the internship be psychological in nature. An internship that primarily involves scheduling, planning, organizing, or other administrative duties would not meet this requirement, regardless of the nature of the site. Thus, all internships must be evaluated based on their content – the specific activities, duties, and responsibilities that the internship involves. As a part of this requirement internships should include activities that require the student to draw from previous knowledge in psychology, to learn new psychology-related information, and to apply both of these in performing tasks new to the student and thereby result in the learning of new skills. For example, an intern might develop guidelines for an emotion processing group for abused children and subsequently assist in facilitating the group. This would require the student to draw on previously learned information and/or learn more about child development, group interactions, and emotions related to child abuse. It would also culminate in the performance of new tasks: program development and group facilitation, and the ability to do these things well would represent a new skill set.

It is also important that the activities not be beyond the skill and training of an undergraduate student. Students should not expect to conduct therapy during their internship – this is an advanced skill performed only by those who have received graduate-level training. However, with appropriate training and supervision (and depending on the specific site) interns may have the opportunity to conduct intake level interviews with new clients, observe and participate in the assessment process, co-facilitate non-therapeutic group sessions (i.e., basic processing groups, educational groups, skills training groups), and participate in treatment team meetings. Interns also are frequently asked to conduct background research (literature reviews), to assist in program development, and to observe a variety of interactions between professionals and clients (e.g., interviews, therapeutic group sessions).

The final requirement is that the intern be provided with on-site supervision from a field professional with advanced training and education (i.e., Masters degree or higher) in psychology or a related discipline (e.g., social work, criminal justice). The on-site supervision is critical to a quality internship experience, and supervisors must agree to meet regularly with the intern. This supervisor is ultimately responsible for providing the intern with appropriate opportunities, for giving them sufficient guidance in all activities, and for ensuring that their work is performed successfully. The intention is that this experience will approximate a graduate-level internship, as it should involve the same kind of training/teaching through close supervision that graduate students receive from their professional supervisors.

### Who may enroll for internship credit?

Faculty supervisors have final discretion as to the readiness of a student for a particular internship experience. The Department considers the summer following the junior year to be the ideal time to complete a capstone internship. Although specific course prerequisites may vary by faculty supervisor and internship site, most require a minimum of three upper-level psychology courses.

### Who is responsible for securing an Academic Internship?

You are. However, the Internship Coordinator (Career Services), Director of Psychology Internships (Dr. Neighbors), and faculty supervisors have many contacts and can help to identify appropriate sites.

### How do I get academic credit for an internship?

Following faculty supervisor approval, you will register for this course in the Summer III session via a signed add card. Academic credit is awarded for the successful completion of the internship. This credit is dependent upon fulfilling your obligations to the internship site and completing all academic requirements. The faculty supervisor will provide you with detailed guidelines regarding the academic requirements. These will vary by faculty member, but may include keeping a journal, writing progress reports, and writing a final paper. The academic requirements are designed to help you make connections between the knowledge you have gained from psychology coursework and the field experience involved in the internship. Academic credit also depends on being registered for PSY33-944 or PSY33-948 (depending on whether you seek elective or capstone credit). Note that a 4-credit (elective) internship requires 120 hours of field experience (the hours you work at the internship), and an 8-credit (capstone) internship requires 240 field hours.

### Internship Placements (Selected 2000-2017)

Aids Services of Austin  
Austin State Hospital  
Autism Center for Education (Austin)  
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Georgetown  
Boys and Girls Club of Georgetown  
Carousel Ranch Equestrian Therapy for Disabled Children (Santa Clarita, CA)  
Center for Child Protection (Austin)  
Central Texas Treatment Center (Granger, TX)  
Children's Medical Center – Department of Psychiatry (Dallas)  
Community Montessori School (Georgetown)  
Cy-Hope Counseling: The Center for Children and Families (Cypress, TX)  
Delpechin Children's Center (Houston)  
Fort Bend County Women's Center (Richmond)  
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cyber Sex Crimes (San Antonio)  
Georgetown Police Department, Victims Services

Harris County Juvenile Probation Center  
Hope Alliance Crisis Center (formerly Williamson County Crisis Center)  
Houston Area Women's Center  
Houston Police Department, Child Sex Abuse Unit  
IONA Senior Services (Washington, DC)  
Lifesteps (Williamson County Council on Alcohol and Drugs)  
Lifeworks Alliance of Youth and Family Services (Austin)  
Millwood Psychiatric Hospital (Arlington)  
National Children's Hospital – Department of Oncology (San Jose, Costa Rica)  
Office of the Texas State Attorney General, Crime Victims Compensation (Austin)  
Office of the Texas State Attorney General, Criminal Prosecutions (Austin)  
Office of the Texas State Attorney General, Juvenile Crime Intervention (Austin)  
Spirit Reins (Liberty Hill)  
STARRY Foster Care (Round Rock)  
State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo – ADHD Treatment Program  
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services – Adult Protective Services (Austin)  
The Arbor (Georgetown)  
The Art Station (Ft. Worth)  
The Caring Place (Georgetown)  
The Christi Center (Austin)  
The Georgetown Project  
Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (Bethesda, MD)  
Williamson County Juvenile Justice – Counseling Services  
Williamson County Juvenile Probation