

# Internship Application Process with a Difference

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Having dealt with a hearing loss as a child and arthritic disorders as a young adult, I am now one of the thankfully growing numbers of differentially abled psychology doctoral students. But as interesting as being a doctoral student can be, having a form of physical, mental, or learning diversity is a challenge above and beyond that experience by the graduate population at large. In successfully managing graduate studies, we have become masters of cutting through academic red tape, navigating social and governmental aid systems, and wrangling with insurance companies to obtain at least what we needed to survive in that system. All this is in addition to the actual demands of our disabling condition, regular coursework, outside employment, social and family demands. If those early graduate years could be called preparatory quizzes, then the internship application process is studying for the final exam. Hopefully, this article will act as a kind of study guide in formulating your own ideas or generating additional questions.

The American Psychological Association (APA) recently published an excellent on-line guide-

book dealing with disabilities in psychology graduate students that can be downloaded at [www.apa.org/pi/cdip/resource/forward.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/cdip/resource/forward.html). This short article will hopefully be an additive personal experiential component to the detailed information presented in the APA on-line guidebook.

When beginning your internship search, of primary concern is the area in which to look for a site. Besides the typical desires of specialization track, research directions, or specific amenities, you may have a focus on specific areas with appropriate medical services available. Your “goodness of fit” to the geographical locale can be another issue, such as higher altitudes being dangerous for persons with asthma or anemias. Conversely, although the American Southwest with its sunny climes might be beneficial for persons with seasonal affective disorder, it would generally not be advisable for those with Lupus or skin cancers. These are personal decisions for the applicant to make with eyes wide-open. Other thoughts on internship site applicability might center on:

- the distance of the site from your residence and the potential toll on your body and psyche via miles and hours on the road. Extra time on the road can be fatiguing to many disorders and the physical mechanics of driving alone may deplete the strength of a person with Muscular Dystrophy, for example.
- the site’s emotional and production demands combined with ongoing physical stressors. Sites



that ask for 50+ hours of weekly production time may actually add a few extra hours for special projects, and many times the hours promised for dissertation time do not materialize. Be prepared to check with your school's training office for input from past interns and the director's own experience as to real time expectations if you have doubts.

- distance from your emotional support base. Although you may not have much time to spend with your loved ones, having those few good people nearby is essential for the rough spots. Having a disability can create opportunities for all sorts of interesting situations and your friends and family can help you stay grounded no matter what adversity you may encounter.

***“For most students, a juicy stipend is highly valued and greatly sought after.”***

Applicants receiving Medicare or Medicaid benefits need to carefully weight their options, because if they exceed the government's financial earning limits they may lose their monthly award and medical insurance. This is where the concurrent existence of internship insurance becomes exceedingly interesting. Not only does the applicant need to know of the existence of such insurance, but also the extent and limits. Additional insurance questions include:

- Is this a group or individual policy?
- Are there any exclusions?
- Is there a prescription plan and what is covered?

As these decisions are being firmed-up, other issues may also be considered. Disclosure concerning your diversifying event is an issue for both those internship applicants whose physical diversity is not readily observable and those for whom it is. Although most people do not readily notice my hearing loss or aides, certain peculiarities could be ascertained after an encounter of more than mere moments. Missed cues, mistaken words, and my need for clarification could potentially have many meanings. Rather than leave the interviewer wondering if I was tired, overly stressed, or worse, I usually choose to inform. Hopefully, this is after providing an opportunity to

others can be dealt with such as availability of insurance and a stipend. For most students, a juicy stipend is highly valued and greatly sought after.

demonstrate my ability to appropriately deal with one on one situations, where I tend to excel!

Each person must ultimately make his or her own decisions as to who and how much information is shared. It is obviously best not to give the “blood and guts” version, yet conversely ignoring an obvious difference creates the proverbial “elephant in the living room” syndrome that we end up counseling our clients through. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the APA regulations assure us that we have a right not to disclose any information at all. However, if we are to make the best fit with a site, judicious amounts of disclosure may be necessary to have our needs appropriately met. The intern site does have the right to ask questions regarding our ability to fulfill the baseline intern functions, given whatever portion of our disabling condition is visible or that we disclose.

Before on-site interviews, a bit of extra investigation work could prove essential for securing a safe, comfortable and hopefully problem-free visit. Having a map of the area with locators specifying handicapped parking, entrances, estimated distances to the various offices, elevators, and restrooms could result in fewer minutes spent wandering and decreased stress levels. Be prepared for travel problems with back-up plans, which might also include the number of a nearby pharmacy or a wheelchair tire shop. Staying overnight at a nearby motel could be judicious, even for a relatively close site, in order to save energies and time.

Phone interviews can be both a blessing for some and a curse for others. Personally, I do not relish the thought of attempting to perform adequately over a telephone, even with assistive listening devices. In my case, it's not just loudness and clarity, but an appropriate visual link with verbal and facial cues. Other applicants may express relief over the anonymity of a faceless conversation. Although you have the option of not applying to sites that offer only phone interviews, you can likewise take the risk of contacting the director of training and explaining your situation in hopes that he or she can change or augment the procedure.

Likewise, with group interviews you have the option of applying to these sites or not. If you participate in a group process, be prepared for potential sticky situations that can occur in larger groups of eager graduate students all vying for a few coveted spots. In my situation, do I really care to shake hands

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with eight or more persons with my arthritic hands on a “bad hand day”? Or should I do a Bob Dole and hold a pen in my hands instead? Although it is doubtful the later concept would work effectively with both hands, I also may not care to share this information with a group of relative strangers. The question of disclosure arises yet again for consideration.

Finally, be prepared for rejection. Even the most brilliant, capable, non-disabled applicant will be rejected from at least some sites. Due to the increasing demand for internships and APA approved sites combined with budget cuts, available sites have become much more competitive. Having a disability is not a certainty for losing a site, but a poorly constructed Curriculum Vitae or aggressive attitude during an interview can certainly be a reason. There may be some sites that will not care to deal with the vitality and altered mindsets our population

brings. So be it – we are better without those sites. “Goodness of Fit” works both ways; the site needs to meld with our wants, needs, and desires as we do to theirs. Just keep all your stress management tools lined-up, including your emotional supporters and ever-patient faculty that have nurtured us.

Now more than ever you’ll need to rely upon the tremendous flexibility you have developed, yet at the same time we have never had such an opening of society and opportunities within our chosen profession. We have survived illness, diseases, insurance companies and the occasional poorly informed medical provider. Having lived psychology from the inside out, we might have a bit of an edge over some of our fellow doctoral students; we’ve been there and done that. Now comes the final crunch before we can all take our victory lap. Best wishes to us all, disabled and not. □