Collecting Information

Collecting information is a crucial step in the application process and should be initiated no later than 3–5 months before the internship application is due. Given that some application deadlines are as early as November 1, students are encouraged to begin the collection process during the summer months. In terms of resources for information about sites, the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Center’s (APPIC) directory (Hall & Cantrell, 1996) provides background facts on all of its members. However, it does not provide basic information (name and address) about all sites accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). The American Psychologist does provide this information in its December issue and typically offers supplemental listings in summer issues. Students should also consult with their academic training directors (ATDs) because academic departments often consolidate direct mailings from internship sites into a binder or folder.

After gathering information through postcard or e-mail requests, students should select a method for identifying the programs in which they are most interested. Stewart and Stewart (1996b) encouraged students to examine the personal and practical considerations of choosing a site. Casey Jacob (1987) developed a grid system that is typically used in ranking sites just before uniform notification day (UND) but could be used to help the student determine which programs to apply to.

The Application Process

To apply or not apply is the first question internship applicants should consider (Rodolfi, Haynes, & Kaplan, 1995). Consultation with the ATD can help students determine personal and professional readiness for internship and can help elucidate internship marketplace dynamics.

Regarding the often-asked question, “How many sites should I apply to?” data suggest that students applied to over 13 sites each before the 1996 UND (Oehlert, Lopez, & Wettersten, 1997), but anecdotal information suggests that the average number of applications grew dramatically during the most recent application period. General consensus among individuals involved in training suggests that students should apply to no fewer than 10 and no more than 20 sites (Student Affiliate Group [SAG] of APA Division 17 Listerve, 1997).

Mellott et al.’s (1997) recommendation of developing an application portfolio is an excellent one because application materials get one’s foot in the door of internship sites (Mitchell, 1996). The portfolio may be even more helpful (to students and prospective internship staff) if it includes a vita, information on research experience (e.g., published manuscripts, grant proposals, and so forth), and a completed APPIC Practicum Experience Documentation Form (available from APPIC central office). In terms of what to emphasize in the application packet, research on internship selection criteria for APA-accredited internships suggests that clinical experience, the interview, and letters of recommendation are deemed most important (Lopez, Oehlert, & Moberly, 1996).

Students and providers of training will be interested to know the APPIC board recently (March 1997) adopted a uniform application and will make it available to its members (Sanford Pederson, personal communication, March 15, 1997). Regarding the concern that sites may receive overabundance of applications because students might photocopy the application and increase the number of sites to which they apply, it is clear from students’ experiences that it is very difficult to keep track of more than twenty applications from a time-management perspective. There is a point of diminishing returns in terms of the number of sites that one can complete applications for, afford visits to, and maintain...
contact with over the selection process. Therefore, the APA Graduate Students (APAGS) Internship Task Force (a) strongly encourages students to limit the number of applications to 20, (b) urges ATDs to support this limitation, and (c) requests that internship training directors (ITDs) adopt the use of the uniform application.

The Interview Phase

As mentioned, APA-accredited internships consider the interview to be the second most important selection criterion. Therefore, it is important that students practice mock interviews with faculty and peers. Videotaping and critiquing may prove helpful. Even if students feel accomplished and capable of successfully interviewing at this point in their careers, some internship interviews may catch students off-guard if they are unprepared. Experiences vary from site to site; students seem to be most challenged by those interviews that include impromptu assessments of students' knowledge in a particular content area (e.g., being handed a Rorschach summary sheet and asked to describe the patient on the basis of it).

Applicants should consult published lists of common interview questions. Additional resources include Levinger and Schefres (1996) and Oehlert, Sumerall, and Lopez (in press). Prospective interns should consider questions about the effects of emerging trends of psychology on the internship training experience.

A topic not addressed by Mellott et al. (1997) is the expense of personal interviews. Although data are still being collected, available anecdotal information (SAG Listserv, 1997) suggests that students spend $500 to $4,000 for travel and lodging during the interview process. Students should consider their financial resources and the possibility of receiving a student loan before the December-January interview period.

Reiteration of interest in sites after the interview is encouraged. However, a recent vote by the APPIC Board resulted in the adoption of a strict policy related to asking, sharing, or using rank information (Sanford Pederson, personal communication, March 15, 1997). Therefore, selecting a first choice will no longer provide an advantage that results in placement, and undue pressure on students to report their rankings should be minimized.

Ranking the Internship Sites

APPIC policies should be consulted throughout the process. In addition, it is recommended that in ranking sites, students consult Stewart and Stewart's (1996a) decision-making technique for choosing an internship. Their system is grounded in decision-making theory to minimize bias. Rankings may carry even more importance in the near future because of the implementation of computer matching, which is slated for the period prior to UND in February 1999 (Sanford Pederson, personal communication, March 15, 1997). APAGS board members and committee and task force chairs expressed their strong support for APPIC's efforts to develop and implement a more effective computer matching program at the recent March 1997 APA consolidated meetings.

Selection Day

On UND, prospective interns are encouraged to frequently consult their rankings, their ATDs, and their significant others and to abide by APPIC guidelines at all times. Until computer matching is on-line, it is essential that applicants withdraw their candidacy from remaining sites after accepting an offer. Reporting decisions to ATDs allows ATDs to focus their placement efforts on students who have not received offers.

Managing Selection Anxiety

Mellott et al. (1997) described the application process as an arduous task and focused on the interview anxiety that all applicants experience. The selection anxiety experienced throughout the application process has been exacerbated by the internship imbalance. Therefore, this anxiety needs to be addressed throughout the process so its accumulation effect can be minimized.

Levinger and Schefres (1996) proposed that students establish supportive dyads to help navigate the process. Oehlert et al. (in press) expanded on the idea and encouraged students to develop supportive groups that rely on the ATD for guidance. Such a group allows applicants to receive encouragement from the network and consultation from the ATD during the pre-application, application, and interview processes.

In regard to managing anxiety on UND, frequent calls to the ATD or designated faculty are encouraged. Although the student may have limited or no experience with the UND process, the ATD and faculty usually are experts. Fears related to nonplacement are real but sometimes irrational. It is important to test assumptions related to beliefs throughout the internship process. In the case of nonplacement, a student should immediately consider entering the formal or informal clearinghouse.

The Clearinghouses

Supply-and-demand dynamics have resulted in the nonplacement of quality candidates, and this nonplacement has been described as random (Sanford Pederson, personal communication, November 20, 1996). Therefore, it is important that students and ATDs know their options if nonplacement occurs. The APPIC Clearinghouse has assisted students and ITDs in finding good matches. In recent years, the Association of Counseling Center Training Agents Clearinghouse has helped match nonplaced students with counseling centers. The underground clearinghouse is an informal clearinghouse in which ATDs, ITDs, faculty, and students collaborate by phone, e-mail, and fax to facilitate placement.

Should One Choose a Non-APPIC Site?

The process and implications of choosing a non-APPIC site were well discussed by Mellott et al. (1997). Unplaced students' persistence and creativity have resulted in placements that have met their doctoral program's criteria for degree granting (Raymond Fowler, personal communication, March 1997). However, these positions are often nonaccredited, unfunded, or both. Choosing to do a non-APA-accredited internship does have numerous job placement implications, some of which were discussed by...
Mellott et al. (1997). It should be noted that academic programs often establish completion of an APA-accredited internship as a selection criterion for assistant professor candidates.

Concluding Remarks

Mellott et al.'s (1997) information and their timeline for preparing for a predoctoral internship provide good tips for prospective applicants. Students are also encouraged to consult articles, books (Dana & May, 1987; Levinger & Schefres, 1996; Megargee, 1992; Oehlert et al., in press), the APAGS Newsletter, and the SAG Newsletter for additional information. In this time of rapid changes to internship selection protocol, it is imperative for students to gain necessary information, particularly that which is research-based and disseminated by organizations directly involved in training. Although strong preparation will assist students in obtaining an internship, non-placement of students will occur because of supply and demand dynamics. Therefore, students are encouraged to find their voice and advocate for improvements in the system.

References


Internship letters of recommendation: Where are the other 90%? Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 19, 115–117.


