To Apply or Not to Apply: That Is the Intern Applicant's First Question

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What are the variables influencing intern applicants' decisions to apply to particular internship training programs? This single-site study investigated the decision-making process of 106 potential intern applicants who decided not to apply to an internship program. Results indicate that a variety of factors (e.g., postponing internship training, sense of limited fit with the program or location, financial or partner concerns) influenced the potential applicants' decisions.

This past internship year, our university counseling center's internship program, which is accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA), received 246 requests for internship application materials. However, only 140 of those potential candidates (57%) applied. This raised the question, Why do potential intern applicants who request information not follow through and apply to our internship program?

Previous research (Drummond, Rodolfa, & Smith, 1981) investigated training directors' decisions to select particular interns. They found that training directors rated most highly applicants of recommendations, practicum experience, prior work experience, APA-approved coursework, clinical psychology background, and personal and professional goals. In essence, training directors assessed clinical skills and professional fit with the agency in making their selection decisions.

Stedman (1992) explored reasons why interns do not accept internship offers. He found the primary reasons were related to limits on training experiences, low stipend, long work hours, the desire to take partners' needs into consideration, and negative program evaluations expressed by current interns to intern applicants. These reasons appear to have less to do with professional fit and more to do with other programmatic or personal factors.

This study investigated factors that influenced potential applicants' decisions to request but not apply to our internship program.

Method

Questionnaire

A 35-item questionnaire was developed. Seven items explored demographic characteristics, and 27 items listed reasons why potential applicants would not apply to our internship program. A number of these items were based on the questionnaire used by Stedman (1992). The final item requested any other comments.

Sample

The names and addresses of all 246 individuals who requested information about our internship program were maintained in a computer file. A list of all the nonapplicants to our program was developed. The pool for this study was the 106 individuals who requested information but did not apply. Of these 106 individuals, 60 (57%) responded to our questionnaire.

The demographic characteristics of respondents were 18 men (30%) and 41 women (68%); average age was 33.4 years (range=25–52 years); 42 (70%) were from clinical psychology programs, and 16 (27%) were from counseling psychology programs. The vast majority (56, 93%) were from APA-accredited programs. Twenty states and two international countries were represented. Forty respondents accepted internships for the 1994–1995 internship year, the majority of which were at university counseling centers (9, 23%), Veteran's Administration medical centers (7, 18%), and hospitals (6, 15%).

Results

The 27 possible reasons for not applying to our internship program, the frequency counts, and percentages are contained in Table 1.

One third of the potential applicants reported that they had not applied to any internship and had postponed their internship experience. Approximately one fifth indicated that on review of the internship brochure, they felt they would not receive the training they desired at our site. Between 5% and 15% indicated that they did not desire to live in California for financial or fam-

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Table 1
Reasons Potential Intern Applicants Do Not Apply to Training Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decided to postpone application process</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sense of fit with the internship program was poor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desired to live in a location other than northern California</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training I sought was not offered by the internship</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our site was located too far away from significant other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living in California is too expensive</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our site was located too far away from other family members</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My partner needed to stay in current local area so I cannot move</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt there were poor future job possibilities in northern California</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of stipend was too low</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel staff could meet my training needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunities for partner in the local internship area appeared poor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perceived it to be too dangerous to live in California</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many work hours required</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application process was too complicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program didn't provide weekly time to work on my dissertation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our site was too close to significant other or other family members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our internship program lacked prestige or a positive reputation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative opinions expressed about the program by current interns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from previous interns was not positive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived the program to be overly structured</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many internship hours devoted to training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many internship hours devoted to clinical work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of internship brochure and application materials was poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochure was poorly written</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochure was too long</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the responses, the following general themes were evident.

**Postponement**

Results indicated that one third of the nonapplicants chose to postpone their internship training for a year. Most of these respondents indicated that they were prescreening internship programs and were not eligible to apply until the following internship year. A few decided to postpone the application process for personal reasons.

**Programmatic Sense of Fit**

Nonapplicants responded to a number of items exploring sense of fit with the internship site. A number of nonapplicants felt our site would not meet their training needs. They commented that the extensive descriptive materials were useful in the selection process. They desired more time for dissertation research, fewer work hours, and a less complicated application form.

**Location**

Location was also an important variable. The desire to live in a location other than northern California, the perceived dangerous nature of California, and the cost of living in California influenced respondents desire not to apply.

**Partner Concerns**

Some applicants desired to remain close to their partners for financial or relational reasons or both. This limited their geographic alternatives, which inhibited their interest in this internship program.

**Financial**

Either current financial concerns (stipends) or future concerns (jobs) inhibited respondents from applying.

In summary, our respondents decided not to apply on the basis of their own personal needs (e.g., training and/or relationships) and preferences (e.g., desire to live in a particular geographical location). Individual decisions were based on thoughtful analysis of program content to determine the potential fit with the agency. These individuals also took location and their family or partner into consideration.

It appears that providing potential applicants with thorough descriptive internship program information facilitates their decisions to apply. Internship programs are encouraged to provide descriptive information of not only their internship structure but also of their interns (e.g., clinical/counseling programs, hours of practicum experience, etc.). In this way, potential applicants can assess their sense of fit with the program and current trainees. Potential applicants do not apply when they feel their needs would not be met or they do not meet the internship
qualifications. By supplying thorough information, intern selection committees will reduce their workload in this time-consuming selection process.

References


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