Personal and Practical Considerations in Selecting a Psychology Internship

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Although the internship literature contains many contributions regarding ways to approach the internship application, interview, and selection processes to satisfy professional goals, few contributions address personal and practical considerations of applicants. This article addresses personal and practical issues, such as benefits, financial costs of relocating and living, family responsibilities, partner relocation, and training and personal responsibilities outside of internship. For all issues discussed, concrete recommendations are provided for helping applicants evaluate internships according to their concerns. A paired-comparison ranking technique for comparing sites along multiple criteria is proposed. The need for updated professional developmental models that incorporate personal and practical variables is also discussed.

Most existing guides for selecting an internship emphasize pursuing the best-fitting internship in terms of professional goals and objectives (e.g., medical–university settings, rotations offered, supervisory styles, didactics, and available career paths after internship), and they offer suggestions for evaluating sites along these dimensions (Belar & Orgel, 1980; Jacob, 1987; Megargee, 1992). Such guides focus less on the subjective, emotional, and practical aspects of the application and decision-making processes, such as benefits, relocation and living expenses, desired location, partner relocation, training and personal responsibilities outside of the internship, and interpersonal environment of the setting. To date, the way these variables ultimately can contribute to one’s experience of the internship, one’s emotional adjustment to it, and one’s overall quality of life has not been examined.

We believe a focus on personal and practical aspects of the internship is warranted because the length of time between beginning the internship and receiving psychology licensure appears to be increasing as a result of the additional practical experience required by state laws (Kaslow, McCarthy, Rogers, & Summerville, 1992; Stewart, 1994). One-year and sometimes 2-year postdoctoral and postinternship supervised work requirements have been written into many state licensure laws for psychologists. Currently, 45 states require at least 1 year of postdoctoral experience, and five states require 2 years (Stewart & Stewart, 1995b). The trend appears to be toward increasing requirements.

The age of most beginning psychologists at graduation interacts with requirements for additional experience in personally and practically affecting the trainee’s life. The mean age for clinical and counseling psychologists on graduation consistently ranges between 32 and 35 years (Rodolfa, Haynes, & Kaplan, 1995; Tipton & White, 1988; Zimpfer, 1993) as compared to the mid-1960s when it was slightly lower with a mean of about 31 years (Krauskopf, Thoreson, & McAleer, 1973). School psychologists now appear to complete their requirements at similar ages (Erchul, Scott, Dombalis, & Schulte, 1989). With additional postdoctoral training requirements, beginning psychologists may be 33 to 37 years old, on average, before being eligible for the typical entry-level positions, salaries, and lifestyles available from the profession.

With increasing age, beginning psychologists also may assume more new roles as spouses and partners, parents, caretakers, workers, homeowners, and so forth than at any time previously before completing professional training in psychology (Kaslow, McCarthy, Rogers, & Summerville, 1992). Because internship comprises the first of 2 or 3 years of required practical experience during which time new life roles and associated responsibilities may be assumed, learning how to take care of your career and emotional needs becomes an important skill to develop as you make the transition to licensed psychologist.

In this article, we (a) elaborate on the personal and practical variables identified by Brill, Wolkin, and McKeel (1985), Grace (1985), Megargee (1992), and Solway (1985); (b) address additional considerations of the internship process; and (c) offer suggestions to help prospective interns evaluate sites in terms of these variables. Our primary purpose is to enhance the internship experience by emphasizing both the professional development concerns and the other important concerns applicants bring to the process as individuals with unique personal interests, emotional needs, responsibilities, limitations, and role obligations.

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The first topic we address is making the decision to pursue an internship. Establishing priorities among personal and practical concerns is then discussed in terms of location, finances, training versus service concerns, and dual-career couples. The third section describes how to address personal and practical needs during your internship interviews. Next, we discuss internship decision-making and selection processes and offer a new method of ranking sites. Finally, we suggest ways to make the transition from student to intern, and we discuss the need for more comprehensive models of professional development.

Decision to Pursue Internship

Initially, the most important personal and professional issue about internship concerns the extent to which you are prepared (emotionally, physically, financially, and academically) for all phases of the process, from the early application phase to actually completing the internship training (Grace, 1985). The decision to pursue an internship should be made on the basis of your readiness, both personally and professionally, and in conjunction with your training director and associated faculty. Such preparedness is essential because it means you will be more receptive to growing from the spectrum of challenges that are inherent in the experience.

There is a difference between the personal and professional preparedness for internship and the readiness that follows simply from having completed doctoral coursework, preliminary examinations, and the dissertation prospectus. Although the latter may be a necessary condition for entering most internships, by itself it appears to be an insufficient basis on which to pursue the internship. Personal unreadiness for internship or feelings of overwhelming stress can substantially affect your development as an intern or impede it altogether (Kaslow & Rice, 1985).

Preparation for internship also involves developing an understanding of the internship experience and of its comprehensive professional scope. According to the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC, 1994), "A psychology internship is an organized training program which, in contrast to supervised experience or on-the-job training, is designed to provide the intern with a planned, programmed sequence of training experiences. The primary focus and purpose is assuring breadth and quality of training" (p. 7). In addition, the internship (a) occurs in an agency that employs at least two full-time, doctoral-level, licensed psychologists; (b) involves a minimum of 1,500 hr to be completed between 9 and 24 months after inception; (c) involves direct client contact at least 25% of the time; and (d) involves at least 2 hr per week of direct supervision and 2 hr per week of other didactic training. The internship occurs postpracticum and must be completed before the doctoral degree is awarded. There are other informative sources that describe the general nature and scope of internships (Dana & May, 1987; Megargee, 1992).

One way that prospective interns may attempt to deal with the unknown aspects of an internship is to construe it on the basis of what is already familiar and known (i.e., practicum experiences during academic training). A costly conceptual and emotional assumption to make is that an internship is merely a 10 to 12-month off-campus practicum. Increased clinical responsibilities, level of autonomy required, demands on time, supervisory relationships, and so forth will all be beyond levels experienced in an academic program and cannot be compared directly to graduate school training. Thus, beginning an internship may require a greater level of adjustment (Kaslow & Rice, 1985).

The person who feels either unready or only marginally prepared for internship may benefit from considering alternatives that ultimately assist in preparing for the process. Such alternatives may include additional coursework, independent study, dissertation completion, a practicum to build specific competencies, work with specific populations, supervision using different theoretical orientations, specific assessment experience such as neuropsychology or learning disabilities, and personal psychotherapy. You should make this decision on the basis of your career goals, knowing that such delay may not be supported by some faculty because it tends to slow the rate at which students finish their program.

Establishing Personal and Practical Priorities

In a manner similar to the way you develop professional goals and priorities for the internship year, it is helpful for you to consider personal and practical variables that may affect you during the selection and completion of the internship. The existing literature and our own experiences with the internship process suggest that several variables are central (Rodolfa, Haynes, & Kaplan, 1995): internship location, finances, training versus service distinctions, concerns for academics, and dual-career couples. These variables, taken singly or in combination, may affect how you assign importance to particular internship sites.

Location

Three investigations of internship applicants consistently identified geographic location as among the most important personal and professional variables involved in internship selection (Burstein, Schoenfeld, Loucks, Stedman, & Costello, 1981; Gloria & Robinson, 1994; Tedesco, 1979). Tedesco’s survey of clinical psychology program applicants found geographic location ranked second to American Psychological Association (APA) certification of the internship. Burstein et al. observed that among highly desirable internship candidates, location ranked above diversity and theoretical orientation of internship programs. Gloria and Robinson’s survey of applicants yielded similar results in that location was second to focus of training in terms of both site selection and acceptance on notification day.

Location refers to the geographic place in which you desire to have your internship experiences. Defined in this way, location may have more to do with the needs and desires of the applicant than it does with the specific professional opportunities offered at a site. Location could mean that you need to stay in a certain town or city, within an hour commute, within a weekend commute, or within a certain geographic locale, such as the Northeast. What personal and practical variables influence your preferences for particular locations of internship sites?

One influential variable involves responsibilities to spouses, partners, parents, or children. If significant others will not be
relocating to the internship site, then deciding how much contact with these persons is needed or wanted should assist in making a decision about location. When surveying prospective sites, find out how readily you can travel from the site back to significant others. What locations maximize the possibility that a partner's needs for employment, education, and contact with his or her family will be met?

Another variable influencing the geographic choice of a site concerns the extent to which you will need to remain in contact with your academic program during the internship year. If one of your goals is to complete the dissertation, then an internship within proximity to your school may be preferable. Geographically isolated sites may provide excellent opportunities if you have completed or can postpone the dissertation or do not have significant personal or family responsibilities during the internship year.

The choice of an internship location may also be affected by the locale in which you want to live and develop professionally after the internship. If you plan to remain in the same town or state as the internship, you should consider what kinds of postdoctoral work experiences are required by state licensure laws and how people meet these requirements in the locale. You should also consider what opportunities exist for networking and developing expertise in specialty areas and should try to imagine whether you would enjoy living in the proximity of the internship site afterward.

**Location**

Location considerations interact with financial considerations in regard to several practical issues: cost of interviewing and interning, cost of relocating to a new site, cost of living while there, opportunities for employment of partners, and so forth. Generally, financial considerations about internship become more prominent when site interviews begin, the move to the internship occurs, and the internship year begins. At the outset of the application process, knowledge of your budget, additional available resources from family or other sources, the available stipend from the internship, and potential costs will help you plan financially and avoid crises that could be disruptive to the experience.

**Travel**

Costs tend to increase dramatically during interviews because of expenses involved in traveling to the site and, most probably, staying there overnight. Air travel tends to be expensive and can inflate costs, especially if you are invited for a site interview but cannot purchase an airline ticket with advance purchase discounts. Frequent flyer tickets can save much money; however, because many interviews may occur in December and early January, there may be blackout dates for these tickets.

You should always purchase airline tickets with a credit card in case the airline has financial problems or is otherwise unable to provide transportation. If you purchase nonrefundable tickets but later do not need or want to travel, most airlines will let you use the ticket, with an additional fee, to fly to other destinations. As the internship selection process progresses, you should monitor your interest and enthusiasm about the sites. You can save money by canceling interviews at distant sites that no longer interest you. Megargee (1992) offered a good suggestion to cut travel costs: Join a travel club.

**Relocation**

You should also assess the cost of living at a prospective internship site (Brill, Wolkin, & McKeel, 1985; Megargee, 1992). The Apartment Relocation Council publishes monthly apartment guides for 104 cities in 37 states; these guides are free and can be obtained by calling (602) 949-1900. Local chambers of commerce or visitor’s centers may possess additional information about the cost of housing, food, transportation, utilities, entertainment, and other goods and services. Banks sometimes have this information available in the form of a relocation packet. The cost of the physical move from your present home to the internship site also should be considered. For shorter distances, moving yourself may be both easier and less expensive than hiring a professional mover.

**Automobiles**

A potentially unanticipated cost of living involves your automobile. If you plan to title your vehicle in the state of the internship, you need to ascertain these costs as soon as possible. With increasing frequency, states are collecting impact fees and taxes on vehicles brought into the state; rates tend to vary according to the year and make of the car. Some localities also require auto emissions tests that could be costly if repairs have to be made on an older car. Another cost involves different kinds and required levels of car insurance in the state of your prospective internship.

**Tuition**

Another budget item, previously unmentioned in the internship literature, includes tuition for your school should you be required to register for dissertation or internship credit hours. The amount of tuition can be affected by your residency status. Are you eligible for and have you applied to receive in-state tuition and fees? If you do not qualify for in-state resident status, you may be able to apply to your university to obtain a special fee waiver or deferment for internship tuition costs.

**Health Insurance**

Finally, the availability of health care and health insurance should be evaluated. For example, you need to find out whether you can obtain health coverage through the internship. In our experience, most medical consortiums and college counseling centers do include these benefits. Most Veterans Affairs medical centers (VAMCs) do not include these benefits directly but may provide them for interns through associations with other medical facilities that comprise an internship consortium. Special arrangements, such as a letter from your department’s training director to your student insurance provider, may be required to continue student insurance coverage.

**Training Versus Service Distinction**

**General Considerations**

We believe the personal and practical needs of intern applicants interact with their professional goals and aspirations in a basic way to affect the kind of work they choose to do, how they experience this work, and their perception of personal and professional rewards gained. Applicants should seek a match, to the extent possible, between what they want personally and professionally and what internships can offer. Although sites possess varied training programs, a basic way in which internships differ concerns the extent to which they emphasize either provision of service to clients or training experiences of their interns. The service–training dimension
may underlie differences in many site-specific selection variables, such as autonomy, theoretical orientation, type of clientele, work environment, supervision, and reputation, that were identified by Gloria and Robinson (1994) and by Tedesco (1979). This important distinction has practical implications for your life during the internship.

In establishing priorities for internship experiences, you should determine what proportion of direct service and training you desire and should evaluate prospective sites accordingly. In making this determination, you need to think about the number of clients and kinds of presenting problems you can see effectively during a typical workday. Some high-volume, high-profile clinics may emphasize seeing a much larger number of clients such that little time is available to prepare for cases of special interest. The manner in which clients are seen affects the types of interventions attempted and the kinds of supervision that may be provided. You should also consider the typical working hours. Some sites involve consistent working hours such as 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., whereas highly service-oriented sites may typically require 12 or more hours per day and occasional evening or weekend work.

Similar considerations apply for completing psychological assessments. Some sites offer the opportunity to learn many different kinds of assessment procedures, whereas others expect you to learn a standard battery. Also consider your learning style and how much assessment supervision you desire. Would you like close supervision on several in-depth assessment cases, or would you prefer learning how to use a standard battery with many cases?

Your past practicum and work experience along with your professional goals after internship will also assist in determining the optimal combination of service and training experiences. Some persons may bring less extensive work and practicum experience to the internship and desire more didactic and training experiences. Internships emphasizing service may be especially helpful to more experienced interns who desire employment in predominantly service-delivery settings after the internship and who want to develop expertise with specific therapeutic technologies.

**Concerns for academicians.** Very little exists in the literature concerning the role of internships for those who desire ultimately to pursue academic positions. Aspiring academicians face the dual challenge of meeting the practical requirements of internship while remaining academically viable for subsequent employment opportunities. To remain competitive, new academicians must maintain professional visibility in their fields through both publications and convention presentations (Watkins, 1992). By design, however, all internships possess at least a substantial focus on clinical practice, which prohibits the sole pursuit of academic endeavors (APPIC, 1994). During internship, some interns may experience pressure to leave academic psychology and become full-time clinicians (Kaslow & Rice, 1985).

Prospective interns with academic goals should determine what proportion of training, service, and research opportunities they desire and then seek sites that provide for these multiple needs. Can research and publication needs be met by collaborating with internship faculty who have ongoing research interests? You should ask if any previous interns have pursued these options and should talk with them to determine feasibility. Consulting with newly placed academicians also can assist in establishing priorities.

In our experience, not all university counseling centers possess training emphases and opportunities for research. Alternatively, not all hospitals or consortium sites exclusively emphasize service. Aspiring academicians who choose or are placed in high-output service settings may experience the frustration of working in a foreign environment and receiving relatively less opportunities for development as an academic psychologist during the internship year.

**Dual-Career Couples**

Currently, the internship selection and completion process is designed primarily for one person: the internship trainee. Those who decide to accompany their spouse or partner during internship face special challenges to their own adjustment that can subsequently affect the quality of their partner's relationship and his or her internship experience. The ordinary stresses of a dual-career couple may be exacerbated by the internship selection process and the physical move to the site. Stressors for the accompanying partner could include loss of a large portion of his or her social support system, potential loss or delay of career opportunities, interruption of income, and role conflict or reversal regarding family and financial obligations. Stoltz-Loike (1992) identified additional challenges for the dual-career couple and methods to cope with them.

Location and financial considerations interact with dual-career concerns in that some locations may provide better professional opportunities than others for a partner. There may be a higher cost of living associated with some sites, which could become significant if you are supporting a temporarily unemployed partner on an internship stipend. It will help your partner to travel with you to internship interviews (especially to those sites for which you have high interest) because that way your partner can get a feel for the location and what it may be like to live there. Your partner also can investigate possible employment opportunities by pursuing leads generated through inquiries before or during the visit. Also, your partner may benefit from having a résumé or vita available for prospective employers, and he or she should also be prepared to do some informational interviewing.

Although your partner's efforts may result in leads or offers for employment, we believe it is risky for him or her to commit to a particular location before selection day because you may or may not receive an offer from the internship site at that location. Being unable to accept job opportunities until after call day will be frustrating for your partner because you may either intern at another location or your partner's employment opportunities may be lost with the passage of time. We disagree with Megargee (1992) that you can rely on preallocated internship slots for your school or university in getting one person pinned down early to facilitate placement of dual-career couples. During any one year, slots may be lost or may be filled by another applicant from your program.

We can offer several suggestions for this aspect of the internship process on the basis of our experience as a dual-career couple. First, internship and career opportunities may be maxi-
mized by considering sites in large urban areas, such as Atlanta, Miami, or St. Louis, or in twin-city or tri-city areas, like Minneapolis–St. Paul or Raleigh–Durham–Chapel Hill. Second, if partners are employed by regional or national companies, you may wish to consider limiting the search for internships to locations where the company has offices or other worksites. Third, if your partner is a member of a professional organization or society (e. g., American Society of Mechanical Engineers, National Association of Educators, or other state or regional associations), he or she may benefit from examining newsletters or related publications that list employment and networking opportunities. Finally, partners should ascertain and use possible employment connections available through family and friends.

Application Process

After establishing personal and practical priorities and professional goals for the internship, you will be prepared to begin the application process. As the process begins, you may feel quite challenged because of the number of applications completed, the number of personal interviews conducted, the geographic location of interviews and modes of travel, financial considerations, decision making with significant others affected by the process, and responses from the sites during and after the interviewing process. During this time, you may also be fulfilling regular academic and other responsibilities. There are ways to approach the process to make it more manageable.

First, you should provide as much time for the application and interview process as possible by scheduling less academically demanding requirements during the fall and winter terms when you will prepare applications and travel to sites. After completing interviews, you will need to make time for contacting sites by telephone, consulting with your training director, and making some tentative decisions.

Second, you should begin early (the summer before you apply) to collect information that may be required by many site applications. Such information may include number of clients seen, number of sessions with particular types of clients, theoretical orientation used, and type of intervention used. Many sites also require information about the number and type of psychological assessment instruments you have administered and interpreted. It may help to construct a table that lists types of client contact (individual, couples, family, children, group, assessment) in table columns and experiences in different training programs on the rows.

Being organized will allow you to progress more efficiently through the application process. For example, you can prepare a master list that includes names of all the sites, addresses, phone numbers, names of training directors and contact people, deadlines, requested materials, and lists of references and whether or not reference letters have been sent and received. You should record contacts you have with sites and, if possible, learn the names of the clerical staff because they can help you contact faculty and interns.

If you are interested in a VAMC, you can obtain a standard federal employment form called the Standard Form 171 (SF-171) and complete it. These 7-page forms are required by many VAMCs as part of the application process and require a comprehensive knowledge of your work history for the past 10 years. If possible, it is well worth the money to have a typist help you complete this form. Although the initial process is time consuming, once you have assembled the information and completed the first copy, it is easy to prepare additional copies. In some cases, photocopies can be made of a single SF-171 and sent to other sites.

You can spend a great deal of effort in preparing personal and professional goal statements to accurately describe your own training needs while simultaneously trying to present yourself as qualified, appropriate, and well-matched to various sites. Thus, in preparing these statements, think about the nature of the training (e. g., specialist vs. generalist emphases) you desire and how this training will help you meet long-term goals. Veterans hospitals, consortiums, community mental health centers, and university counseling centers each offer different experiences. Be as clear as possible regarding the type of experience you are seeking and how your academic and clinical experiences qualify you for a particular internship. After you have described yourself as well as your career goals and interests, have your director of training review your statements for brevity, clarity, and relevance.

The question of how many sites to apply to always arises during the application process. Tedesco (1979) observed that applicants from clinical psychology programs made an average of 13 applications. More recently, Gloria and Robinson (1994) found counseling psychology students applied to an average of about eight sites. Megargee (1992) recommended choosing 12 ± 2 sites including a group of highly preferred sites, acceptable but not optimal sites, and sites that would probably assure you of an internship but which may be far from optimal.

As competition for internship slots increases, you may feel pressure to apply to more sites to increase your likelihood of receiving an offer. However, you may reach a point when completing additional applications will not be advantageous because you lack the time to apply, the funds to interview, or the ability to state clearly why one site is a better match than all the other sites to which you have applied (Gloria & Robinson, 1994). Thus, in deciding where to apply, carefully choose programs that would satisfy your needs regarding the following: location, finances, clinical and supervisory experiences, opportunities for professional development after internship, employment opportunities for you and your partner, emotional and relational needs, and overall impressions.

Assessment of Sites Through Interviews

Interview policies vary across internships. Some screen initial applications and then invite selected applicants, whereas others allow all interested applicants to visit. In both cases, sites often require applicants to choose from several predetermined interview dates. Because invitations to visit are sometimes not extended until December or times after which you have scheduled visits to other sites, it can be difficult to arrange interviews efficiently. If possible, try to complete as many interviews as possible in November and December. Most sites are receptive to telephone inquiries about their internships and some may allow a visit to the site before the formal application is made. Preapplication visits allow a more relaxed way of evaluating potential sites early.
Although stressful at times because you must be “on” with both the faculty and current interns, the interview provides you with the opportunity to evaluate sites in terms of your professional criteria and salient personal and practical variables. We discuss several of these variables in this section. One general suggestion we offer before you begin traveling is to invest in a portable cellular phone. A cellular phone can greatly help ease the tension of unanticipated problems that arise when you are trying to locate either your hotel or the internship site in an unfamiliar location.

Preparation for Interviews

Several authors have provided questions for both the applicant and the interviewer to consider in preparing for internship interviews (Hersh & Poey, 1984; Megargee, 1992; Monti, 1985). Both internship sites and individual faculty differ in how they approach the interview process. During some interviews, you may be asked standard interview questions. Other interviewers may invite you to ask them questions or discuss issues important to you without posing any questions of their own. You should be prepared to interact effectively in both kinds of interviews so as to show your enthusiasm and to obtain answers to your questions.

For both types of interview formats, you need to be prepared to address your professional strengths and weaknesses. In selling yourself, you should neither exaggerate your capabilities nor be too modest about your accomplishments. You should not only speak about your relative strengths, you should also demonstrate them in the interview through behaviors and questions. Do you convey a desire to learn and an openness to supervision or do you come across as an expert who may be less receptive to new learning experiences?

Prepare beforehand for the type of interview in which you ask the questions. It is appropriate to bring a notebook within which you have a list of prepared questions. It is often helpful to have both general and specific questions written beforehand for people with whom you may interview. Questions that you can ask interviewers include the following: How is a rotation structured or what might my daily schedule look like? Are there any rotations that are more challenging than others—in what ways? What is your supervisory style? If a Veterans Affairs hospital is associated with a medical school, how do the students from the medical school fit in? Are there postdoctoral positions available after internship? Considering licensure requirements, is it possible to obtain more hours of supervised experience than the internship routinely offers?

Interviewers may ask questions about how you became interested in working with certain client problems, particular settings, or rotations. The interviewer who asks what he or she can tell you about the site provides an excellent opportunity for you to engage in conversation that may reflect how well matched you are to the site. If you are very interested in a site, you should obtain telephone numbers of specific interviewers so that you can contact those interviewers during the postinterview period. You may also want to obtain the phone numbers of interns who have already completed or are currently on rotations of interest but with whom you were unable to meet.

Subjective Variables

Approach the site as if it were a client and try to listen with a third ear (i.e., subjectively and viscerally). Listen for what is said and what is not said as well as how information is presented. Do the interactions feel open, forthright, evenhanded, and informative, or is there defensiveness (in either you or the staff), evasiveness, ambiguity, or a lack of connection? Your gut feeling about a site could be the most revealing and useful instrument available when you begin to make some tentative decisions. If something is wrong at this level, try to find out what it is. As the interviews for a particular site come to a close, you should think about whether you could imagine working around the clients, faculty, and facilities of the site. Cole, Kolko, and Craddick (1981) observed that the general emotional climate of the internship and the support of faculty highly influenced interns’ overall ratings of internship quality.

Contact With Faculty

Pay attention to how the interviews with faculty and interns are organized during the visit. Do the faculty make special efforts to answer your questions or obtain desired information? How do the faculty interact with each other? Over the course of interviews, do things run smoothly or are the logistics of scheduling, introductions, and debriefings disjointed or poorly managed? Although emergencies and other irregular circumstances do occur, staff members who manage to miss or dramatically foreshorten your interview with them may also behave similarly if you were to have supervision or other interactions regularly scheduled with them during the internship. If possible, you should clarify your impressions by consulting present or former interns.

Contact With Present Interns

Most internship sites provide applicants time to visit with present interns to get the real lowdown on the program. Because these interns could be enlisted by the internship faculty to help in the assessment of candidates, they may not provide prospective interns with the full information they are seeking. For this reason, seek the names of interns from past years. Often, these are available in the printed material distributed by the internship site. If possible, you should contact them and obtain their impressions of the site and how the internship prepared them for their current employment. Inquire if they know of classmates who had special problems or difficulties with the site and how these problems were resolved.

Present and past interns can describe the supervision and evaluation process for interns. What procedures exist to remediate deficiencies in both the intern and at the site that may be identified during internship? For intern deficiencies, can extra work or other experiences be incorporated into existing schedules? Are you required to repeat a rotation if training requirements have not been met satisfactorily? If so, how does this affect the stipend or other benefits, such as insurance, time off, and so forth?

Expected Relationship With Interns

An important question concerns the extent to which the internship site expects you to interact and develop relationships
with other interns (providing there are a sufficient number of interns at the site). You should consider whether routine contact with peers is wanted or needed. Some internships are organized such that collegial contacts with other interns occur infrequently. Alternatively, is there an expectation for the interns to come together as a group? If so, what group experiences does the faculty expect interns to have? Some internships offer experiential groups and encourage their interns to attend.

Size up the competition if other applicants are interviewing at the same time, trying to imagine if you would be comfortable sharing an office or working closely with them. The kinds of persons being interviewed may be revealing about both the faculty and activities of a particular site. From what institutions do other applicants come, and what are their training backgrounds?

**Physical Variables**

Pay attention to the physical facilities of the site. Although most hospitals usually are confusing on a first visit, you should ask yourself if you could find your way around or easily learn the layout. Other questions include the following: Would you be assigned an office or expected to share one with other interns or with your supervisor? Are computers available for test scoring and report writing? What facilities exist for audio- or videotaping of therapy sessions? Is any traveling involved, such as driving between hospitals or clinics in a consortium internship? Are the activities of the internship reasonably planned to take into account the travel time and parking between facilities? What is the availability and location of intern parking? How safe is the passage from buildings to parking?

**Personal Psychotherapy**

Internship can be stressful at times, especially at the beginning when you are not only adjusting to a new geographic location but are also trying to acclimate to a work and training experience that can be intense from the start. For these reasons, find out if the site provides any support, counseling, or psychotherapy assistance. If so, do you have to use your insurance or does the site provide pro bono services by specially assigned faculty who remain outside of the roles of internship supervisor or evaluator? Does the site expect you to participate in a group with other interns to address these needs? How available is the training director to address such needs? The overall issue here is how the site may help you take care of your mental health and other important personal concerns.

**The Postinterview Period**

Consideration of personal and practical variables in the decision-making and selection processes involves a review of what you want from particular sites as well as what you may be willing to sacrifice for a site that possesses strengths in certain areas. Throughout the postinterview period, you should maintain contact with sites of interest. Immediately after interviews with such sites, write thank-you notes to all faculty and interns you want to remember you. You may also send a letter to the training director or other faculty members communicating your continued interest and enthusiasm for their program.

**Ranking Sites**

After completing all interviews, it is helpful to review each site’s features and to compare them systematically on important variables. Although Jacob (1987) devised a decision grid for ranking internship sites, her technique does not involve direct comparisons of sites. The paired-comparison ranking technique (Stewart & Stewart, 1995a) requires a systematic comparison of sites on criteria chosen by the applicant.

To use the paired-comparison technique, follow the following procedures: The process begins with the ranking of your selection criteria, which may include professional, personal, and practical variables. Write the site features and important criteria on index cards and decide which are the most important; cards should be numbered from the most important features (#1) to the least important. Create a grid on a sheet of paper, writing the selection criteria into the columns above the grid. Write names of sites to the left of the grid on the rows. Rank the sites next, beginning with the most important criterion (first column) down to the least important. Write each site name on an index card first, then lay the card with the most important selection criterion on the table. To compare sites in a pair-wise manner, put the cards from sites #1 and #2 on the table. Ask yourself which site satisfies the criterion best; make a choice and allow no ties. Put a hash mark under the criterion column in the row next to the site chosen—these will be counted and a number entered into each grid cell corresponding to the number of times the site was chosen. Next, rank sites #1 and #3 on the criterion, then #1 and #4, #1 and #5, and so forth.

When all remaining sites have been compared to the first site, compare sites to the second site (i.e., compare sites #2 and #3, #2 and #4, and so forth). Do these comparisons until all sites have been compared on the first selection criterion, and then repeat the whole process for the remaining selection criteria. When the grid is completed, write the name of the site that received the largest number of top choices for each column. Results from the first two or three columns particularly will be significant because these represent sites that satisfy your most important criteria. Overall rankings can be determined by summing the cell counts across each row.

We have found the paired-comparison ranking technique useful because it helps one to consider systematically sites in a way that is similar to how applicants may compare two sites they have visited consecutively. The sheer number of comparisons being made helps applicants to consider the criteria they use and how sites satisfy them. For instance, Jacob’s (1987) grid contained 7 sites rated on 9 criteria for a total of 7 × 9 = 63 ratings. In contrast, Stewart and Stewart’s (1995a) method involves four times as many direct comparisons (252) among sites for the same number of sites and criteria.

**Making Decisions**

Once you have ranked sites, you will be able to make some tentative decisions. You may choose to share results of the decision-making processes with some sites as internship sites in-
increasingly emphasize the selection of a #1 choice among sites (Gloria & Robinson, 1994; Johnson, 1986; Megargee, 1992). Despite the current trend of completing 12 or more applications, declaring a #1 choice effectively reduces you to a single application until you learn of your status from that site on notification day.

Communicating to a site that it is a #1 choice does not assure you of an offer. In our experience, however, telling a probable site (i.e., a site that appears interested in you) they are #1 may help you rank higher on their list. To help determine an internship site's interest after the interview, notice if and how the staff communicates with you. If the faculty or delegated interns telephone or write after the interview, you can be relatively confident you are under active consideration. Sites do not make this contact unless they have some interest. Just because a site contacts you after an interview, however, does not mean that you will receive an offer. Conversely, you should not discount sites that do not call; by policy, some sites do not follow up in this manner. The variability in sites' behavior toward applicants after interviews seems very wide.

Internships increasingly are querying applicants about how their site ranks. In part, this is to ensure that they select from a pool of committed applicants (Johnson, 1986; Megargee, 1992). How do you answer such questions in a way to communicate your interest but without committing yourself too early? You can inform your top two to three sites that they are on the short list among others being considered. Alternatively, you may tell a site it ranks highly or is your #2 choice. If you are queried about your preferences while still in the interview phase, it is acceptable for you to state that you still have other sites to visit before making rankings and that you will stay in touch.

Our recent experience with the selection process tells us there are more applicants than internship slots at this time; this creates an internship market. These anecdotal impressions have been supported somewhat by data from the 1995 APPIC Clearinghouse that indicates applications to the Clearinghouse doubled from 1991 to 1992 (G. Williams, personal communication, March 15, 1995). For nearly every year since 1992, approximately 300 or more applications are made for assistance with internship placement. This increased trend for placement assistance exists while the number of internship programs contacting the Clearinghouse has remained rather steady since 1986. In addition, the APA Monitor (Murray, 1995) recently reported increasing concern by both APPIC and APA about the future availability of internship slots. Efforts are currently under way to empirically assess the internship supply and demand characteristics.

Should you not receive an offer on notification day, you will still have an opportunity to make decisions regarding an internship or similar experience by consulting either the APPIC Clearinghouse or a non-APA-certified site. Although the latter alternative may seem tempting, the trend is toward increasing credentials required for entry into the profession. Embarking on a non-APA-certified internship ultimately may make it more difficult to obtain licensure as well as to gain entry on managed care panels.

Before Leaving for the Internship

The formal transition from graduate student to psychology intern involves the emotional challenges of separation and loss, which some interns may not be prepared to meet (Solway, 1985). In addition, structures for addressing these challenges may not exist at either the academic program or the internship site (Brill, Wolkin, & McKeel, 1985). We believe that cognitive awareness of the stressful nature of the transition can facilitate emotional adjustment in several ways.

First, make arrangements for your physical relocation to the internship and set a definite date for establishing yourself there. Give yourself time to adjust to the site and city before actually beginning work; this helps you learn how to relax in your new surroundings. Brill, Wolkin, and McKeel (1987) presented a useful relaxation script for transitioning to the internship's location. Being settled and adjusted to new environs is not equivalent to simply unpacking a day or so after arriving (Olson, Downing, Heppner, & Pinkney, 1986).

Second, formal or informal gatherings with significant persons also help to facilitate the transition. Meeting with other internship applicants from your school or department to share information and experiences can help you begin to contemplate your new role as an intern. Such a meeting that also includes next year's class of internship applicants allows you and your peers the opportunity to pass along your knowledge and practical suggestions. At some universities, such a meeting is held soon after notification day while experiences with the process are still fresh for the interns-to-be.

Finally, take care of your needs for either terminating or sustaining relationships with teachers, mentors, friends, and colleagues. It is important to talk with these persons about your past relationship with them and to discuss what the future may hold for the relationship. This process may be marked by a departmentwide send-off for interns that includes faculty, students, and significant others. Holding this event in the mid to late summer and before the first intern leaves facilitates closure and recognizes the personal and professional accomplishments of interns before they end their residence in the program.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to emphasize the human factors of the internship process by identifying and discussing personal and practical considerations that may be priorities (along with other professional goals) during the important year of applied training. Similar to Eckstein and Wallerstein (1958), we view the professional self as an extension of the individual's personal self. Developing the former requires also attending to the needs of the latter. We have conveyed practical suggestions that are based on our experiences with the internship process for developing skills to meet personal and practical needs against a backdrop of increased competition for a limited number of internship slots and increased practical work experiences required for psychology licensure. The emphasis on obtaining an internship or postdoctoral fellowship in this current professional climate mitigates against choosing the optimal experience such that the person, and his or her personal and practical needs, may be left out of the process.

The existing models of professional development have not yet incorporated the types of personal and practical variables we have discussed but have instead focused more specifically on how the person develops professionally within training experi-
ences (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Kaslow & Rice, 1985). These and subsequent models may enjoy a wider range of applicability by addressing several questions.

First, how do practical concerns and phenomena outside the internship affect how interns manage the emotional demands of beginning an internship? Similarly, how do these concerns affect the intern's sense of autonomy and competence, which are prerequisites for forging a stable, individuated professional identity as the internship concludes? Second, to what extent should interns emphasize meeting the personal needs and recognizing the practical limitations of their trainees? Finally, how would such emphases enhance or impede the training goals of internship programs? Super's (1980) "life-span, life-space" approach to career development, which emphasizes how work and career behavior are affected by the developmental interaction of multiple life roles, may provide an appropriate theoretical framework for addressing these questions.

References


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