



VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment

VA Connecticut
Healthcare System
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Fellowship Overview

The VA Office of Academic Affiliations is sponsoring a VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, West Haven campus, through two major research infrastructures: the Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and the National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD). The VA Advanced Fellowship Program offers individualized, mentored clinical research and clinical training in two high priority emphasis areas—substance use disorders (SUD) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Each year, The Fellowship recruits two psychologists for a two-year fellowship, one in each emphasis area. The psychology fellowship is fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association. The next site visit will be in 2021.

The primary goal of the VA Advanced Fellowship Program is to train psychologists to become exceptional clinical researchers in high priority areas of VA mental health. The fellowship follows a scientist-practitioner model and is designed to offer clinical research training as well as advanced clinical training in one of two emphasis areas: SUD or PTSD. The fellowship training is distinct in its strong focus on the latest methodological approaches to clinical research and practice within an interdisciplinary setting. Fellows are individually mentored in clinical research by VA/Yale faculty and primarily housed in either the Substance Abuse or PTSD Program, but also interact with other programs in the Mental Health Service Line such as the Neuropsychiatry Program, Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Health Psychology, Inpatient Psychiatric Unit, and Psychiatric Emergency Room. Fellows work with individual research mentors to develop a training plan that supports the fellow's professional goals.

Program Philosophy & Model of Training

The VA Advanced Fellowship Program follows a scientist-practitioner model and places strong emphasis on state-of-the-art methodological approaches to clinical research and practice. The Fellowship provides advanced clinical research training through individualized mentorship with skilled faculty in addition to traditional clinical training within an interdisciplinary team focused on one of the two emphasis areas. Training also offers state-of-the-art seminars and didactics focused on research methods, statistics, epidemiology, mental health systems, quality improvement methods, education and service delivery. Fellows devote 75% of their time to patient oriented research and 25% to direct patient clinical care. The VA Advanced Fellowship Program is embedded within the VACHS, where the mission is “to provide high quality health care that meets the needs of the Veteran patients, to promote health through

prevention, and to maintain excellence in teaching and research.” Complementary to the VACHS’s mission, are the missions of the VA Advanced Fellowship emphasis areas:

- **SUD** - To improve health care services for Veterans with co-occurring mental illness and addiction problems through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of dual diagnoses. These Veterans have unique needs for integrated assessment and care.
- **PTSD** - To advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's Veterans through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders.

The VACHS is a designated teaching hospital affiliated with Yale University School of Medicine; therefore, experiential training is enhanced by advanced didactics and clinical research participation in an academically oriented environment.

Program Goals & Objectives

The goal of the VA Advanced Fellowship Program is to offer training experiences that encourage the acquisition, development, and refinement of professional skills, research proficiencies, and clinical practice competencies for fellows working with Veteran populations. This interdisciplinary program aims to train psychologists with an interest in clinical research to become outstanding clinical researchers in high priority areas of Veteran mental health.

In order to fulfill the goals of fellowship training, all fellows must demonstrate an advanced level of skill and knowledge in the following areas by the completion of the fellowship program, as measured by supervisors' evaluations of the specific competencies.

Competency 1: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Intervention: Fellows will develop advanced competencies in the use of empirically derived treatments and systemic means of psycho-diagnostic and neuropsychological evaluation of patients.

Competency 2: Consultation, Supervision, and Teaching: Fellows will gain advanced skills in delivering consultation to inter-professional teams, develop advanced skills in the supervision of psychology trainees including interns and practicum students, and gain experience providing psycho-education to patients, family members and providers.

Competency 3: Scholarly Inquiry: Fellows will acquire competencies in several aspects of clinical research and scholarship. Key competency areas are discussed below.

a) *Integration of Science and Practice*: Fellows will learn to utilize the scientific literature to guide their clinical practice, and will use “lessons learned” from clinical practice to foster and shape their scientific hypotheses. Fellows will learn to use their emerging competencies in clinical science to identify solutions to emerging clinical problems they encounter in practice and will systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their clinical work (e.g., monitoring patient outcomes).

b) *Conducting Clinically Informed Research*: Fellows will gain advanced skills in conducting clinically focused research pertinent to the mental health needs of today’s Veterans.

Competency 4: Organization, Management, Administration, and Program Evaluation:

Fellows will gain experience in organizational management and administration pertinent to the career development of clinical psychologists and scientists. Fellows may choose additional training experiences that facilitate the development of advanced competencies in program evaluation.

Competency 5: Professional, Ethical, and Legal Issues: Fellows will become competent (as appropriate for an entry level professional) in professional and collegial conduct, knowledge of the ethical guidelines of clinical psychology, and those ethical guidelines that govern the appropriate conduct of human subjects research. They will also become appropriately familiar with the wide array of legal issues relevant to the proper conduct of clinical psychology and human subjects related research.

Competency 6: Cultural and Individual Diversity Issues: Fellows will further develop their awareness and appreciation of cultural and individual differences and will attain cultural competence regarding the delivery of mental health services to a diverse population of Veterans.

Competency 7: Confidence and Professional Identity: Fellows will develop a strong professional identity, confidence, and professional demeanor commensurate with their status in the profession.

Program Structure

Fellows devote 75% of their time to research and educational activities and 25% to clinical training. In collaboration with their mentors, Fellows will develop and implement a research project, publish and present findings, participate in grant writing, and utilize the latest technology for educational activities and clinical service delivery. Over the course of the two-year program, fellows will be trained in clinical research skills and advanced clinical service delivery with evidenced-based treatments among Veteran populations within an interdisciplinary setting. The fellowship combines individually mentored clinical research and clinical training with advanced educational experiences. In addition to the Advanced Fellowship, several other psychology and psychiatry fellowships exist at VACHS, allowing fellows to be part of a community of other advanced trainees. More information on other psychology fellowship options can be found at <http://www.connecticut.va.gov/careers/psychologytraining.asp>

Seminars & Didactics

Advanced educational experiences include a twice-monthly video conferencing seminar in which a leading experts in the field presents to all VA Advanced Fellows nationally. The didactic seminars focus on two main areas: 1) presentations on the most recent advances in clinical research in mental health and 2) presentation on all aspects of career development from grant and manuscript preparation to the role of mentorship. Recent seminar topics have included VA career development, funding and resources, behavioral genetics, health informatics, designing clinical trials for behavioral therapies, funding mechanisms, and career development awards. Ongoing multi-site workshops on manuscript and grant preparation are also provided to the Fellows in addition to ongoing biostatistics seminars. On-site seminars address multicultural issues, professional development, and topics specific to substance abuse / dual diagnosis or PTSD. Fellows may also attend optional seminars at Yale University School of Medicine.

Requirements

In addition to the Eligibility Requirements listed on the VA psychology training homepage (<http://www.psychologytraining.va.gov/eligibility.asp>), applicants for this fellowship must meet additional requirements, listed below.

Eligibility Requirements for all VA Trainees:

1. U.S. citizenship. VA is unable to consider applications from anyone who is not currently a U.S. citizen. Verification of citizenship is required following selection. All interns and fellows must complete a Certification of Citizenship in the United States prior to beginning VA training.
2. A male applicant born after 12/31/1959 must have registered for the draft by age 26 to be eligible for any US government employment, including selection as a paid VA trainee. Male applicants must sign a pre-appointment Certification Statement for Selective Service Registration before

they can be processed into a training program. Exceptions can be granted only by the US Office of Personnel Management; exceptions are very rarely granted.

3. Interns and Fellows are subject to fingerprinting and background checks. Match result and selection decisions are contingent on passing these screens.
4. VA conducts drug screening exams on randomly selected personnel as well as new employees. Interns and Fellows are not required to be tested prior to beginning work, but once on staff they are subject to random selection for testing as are other employees.

Specific Fellowship Eligibility Requirements:

1. Graduated from an American Psychological Association (APA) accredited doctoral program in clinical or counseling psychology.
2. Completion of an APA accredited internship in clinical or counseling psychology.

A stipend is provided both for the first year and second year of the program with a stipend increase in the second year. These stipends are reviewed biannually and are adjusted according to rates paid by comparable non-VA postdoctoral fellowship programs. For the 2016-17 training year, the stipend is \$46,533 for year one with a stipend increase to \$49,070 in year two

Applications & Fellowship Site Contact Information

Interested psychologists who meet the eligibility requirements should send the following application materials to the Fellowship Director and Director of Training for Psychology: a CV; cover letter identifying a research area of interest (substance abuse/dual diagnosis or PTSD), specific VA MIRECC or NC-PTSD faculty of interest, and research goals for fellowship; three letters of recommendation from supervisors familiar with your work; and graduate school transcripts (unofficial transcripts are acceptable for application but official ones will be required if applicant is selected) by **December 5**.

Interviews for this fellowship will occur in December and January. Fellowship start dates are set between July 1 and September 1 for a two-year period of fellowship training.

Fellowship Director	Director of Training for Psychology
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The VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at VA Connecticut Healthcare System is accredited by the American Psychological Association. For information regarding APA accreditation of this fellowship or other accredited fellowships, please write or call:

Office of Program Consultation & Accreditation
 American Psychological Association

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