

53| Internship Preparedness, Applications, and Interviews – With Dr. Suzanne Penna

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This is an audio transcription of an episode on the Navigating Neuropsychology podcast. Visit www.NavNeuro.com for the show notes or to listen to the audio. It is also available on the following platforms:



Speakers: Suzanne Penna, Leslie Gaynor, John Bellone, Ryan Van Patten



Intro Music 00:00



John Bellone 00:17

Welcome, everyone, to Navigating Neuropsychology: A voyage into the depths of the brain and behavior, brought to you by INS. I'm John Bellone...



Ryan Van Patten 00:25

...and I'm Ryan Van Patten. Today we have a bonus episode for you. Our rockstar co-production coordinator, Leslie Gaynor, will be hosting an episode on internship

applications. Leslie is a graduate student at the University of Florida, and is currently on internship herself at Emory University. Leslie, welcome to NavNeuro.



Leslie Gaynor 00:45

Thank you guys. Before I start, I have some questions about internship for you both.



John Bellone 00:50

Put us on the spot. [laughs]



Ryan Van Patten 00:51

Please.



Leslie Gaynor 00:53

Ryan, you're first. Can you tell me one word that you would use to describe your internship application and interview journey?



Ryan Van Patten 01:03

Wow, one word?



Leslie Gaynor 01:05

Just one.



Ryan Van Patten 01:06

Yes. I'll have to go with: time-consuming.



Leslie Gaynor 01:09

Okay.



John Bellone 01:10

I think that's a good one! [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 01:14

Why "time-consuming"?



Ryan Van Patten 01:16

That is - literally the first thing that comes to mind when I think about the entire process of internship applications is just how many hours it took.



Leslie Gaynor 01:24

So many hours.



John Bellone 01:26

Surprisingly time-consuming when you don't realize that from the beginning. Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 01:30

Oh, yeah. Well, then I have a question for you, John.



John Bellone 01:34

Okay.



Leslie Gaynor 01:34

It's your turn for the spotlight. [laughs]



John Bellone 01:37

Okay. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 01:38

So, can you tell me an embarrassing or funny story about your internship application or interview process? Something you've never told anyone before.



John Bellone 01:50

So, yeah, I don't know how funny this is, and it wasn't really too embarrassing, but being the "California kid" going for internship interviews all across the country and on the East Coast. I was in DC and - obviously, the interviews happen in-person at the coldest time of the year. So I was in DC, and it happened to be a particularly cold winter and week, and I didn't bring a coat. Being again from California, I had my suit jacket, and I walked from my Airbnb to the DC VA and didn't have a coat on. I was freezing...



Leslie Gaynor 02:31

Oh no...



John Bellone 02:32

It was like a 20 minute walk. I'm very frugal for those who don't know me, so I was not going to take an uber or a taxi there. So I froze on the way there. And then when I got to the site, one of the current interns at the VA said that she saw me walking and knew that I was an applicant or an interviewee because she could tell I was not from the East Coast.



Leslie Gaynor 02:32

You were not well-equipped! [laughs]



John Bellone 02:41

Yeah. Although then I thought, "Well, why didn't you, you know, ask me if I needed a ride or something?" [laughs] That would have been nice for her to do. But she said it in front of everyone, like I was the, you know, "California kid", who was out of place.



Ryan Van Patten 03:13

Which was true...



John Bellone 03:15

It was very true. Yeah. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 03:16

Yeah. As a "Florida kid", I understand the lack of preparedness. [laughs] So I have a question for both of you. What is one piece of advice you would give our listeners who have yet to apply for internship about how to approach the internship application process?



John Bellone 03:34

Other than bring a coat to your internship interviews? [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 03:38

Yes. I think we want some hard hitting advice. [laughs] We want something with meat.



Ryan Van Patten 03:45

Is that the quality of advice you have, John?



John Bellone 03:48

Yeah, that's it. That's all I got.



Leslie Gaynor 03:49

Well, I'll stick with Ryan. Yeah. [laughs]



Ryan Van Patten 03:52

Go ahead.



John Bellone 03:53

No, I would say that, going back to the comment about how time-consuming this process is, to start as early as you can. Usually that means early summer for those who are going to apply that year. Just factor in how much time it's going to take to write good, solid essays, have those essays vetted by professors and colleagues, and go back and forth at different edits. Just plan ahead for that process.



Leslie Gaynor 04:23

Yeah, I think that's really good advice. I mean, I had you both look at my essays and I know that helped a lot - just to get the perspective of someone outside of my graduate school, even to see what they thought of my work. So that's really good advice.



John Bellone 04:38

And you think just a 500-word essay would be something you could write in your sleep by now...



Leslie Gaynor 04:43

Right.



John Bellone 04:43

But, it was surprisingly difficult.



Leslie Gaynor 04:45

Yeah.

Ryan Van Patten 04:46



Yeah, this is not the task on which to procrastinate, for sure. To add to that, John, I'd say start working early and break tasks down into smaller parts as much as you can. If you try to envision the entire process as one single task, it is entirely overwhelming. So, break it down. But, my answer to your question, Leslie, would be, I think the best piece of advice is to try to cultivate a positive attitude as much as possible. From what I've seen, in my own experience of course, it's really easy to feel very stressed and anxious and overwhelmed over all of the things that you have to do in order to apply and then interview. But I've also known people who have a lot of fun throughout the process. And we know from research that physiological sensations that we feel can either be positive or negative, depending on how we think about them. You know, you can either be anxious and fearful or excited and happy just based on your frame. Obviously, we learn that as we're becoming clinical psychologists, and I think it's really applicable to internship applications. So to the extent that's possible, try to frame it in a positive light.

John Bellone 05:58



Yeah, I would say both for the application process and for the interviewing process to have fun with it. It's even more important when the anxiety can impact your performance - you know, your ability to come off genuinely. So, I like that advice.

Ryan Van Patten 06:11



Agreed.

Leslie Gaynor 06:12



Well, I'm impressed. You guys aren't my chosen special guest for this episode, but you still gave some pretty good advice for the listeners.

Ryan Van Patten 06:22



Bring a coat. That's very sage wisdom.

John Bellone 06:24



[laughs]

Ryan Van Patten 06:25



Good thing we have John Bellone here to say this.



Leslie Gaynor 06:27

Oh, thank goodness for John Bellone. [laughs]



John Bellone 06:31

Well, Leslie, we will turn it over to you for the rest of the episode. So take it away. We are very grateful that you wanted to take this on, and it's all yours.



Leslie Gaynor 06:41

Thanks for letting me host, guys, talk to you later.



Transition Music 06:43



Leslie Gaynor 06:54

[Voiceover] Today, I'll be talking to Dr. Suzanne Penna about clinical internships, internship preparedness, applications, and interviews. Dr. Penna is a board certified neuropsychologist. She is an associate professor and Director of Neuropsychology Training for the graduate internship and fellowship training programs at Emory University, and a clinician at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. She currently serves as secretary and treasurer for the Association for Internship Training in Clinical Neuropsychology (AITCN). She also happens to be my internship training director.



Leslie Gaynor 07:33

[To Dr. Penna] There is social distancing going on, but we can see each other from afar.



Suzanne Penna 07:37

Yes, we can. We're being appropriate.



Leslie Gaynor 07:41

[Voiceover] During today's episode, we will discuss clinical internships. We will also spend some time talking about how the internship application process will differ this cycle due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most of the episode will cover internship in general, parts of this episode will go over neuropsychology-specific internship preparedness and experiences. Additionally, this episode is most relevant to students pursuing internship in the United States. An important note: If you are an international student, check out navneuro.com/global to access resources pertaining to international neuropsychology. One last thing, I want to start

off by saying that applying for internship can be stressful. We hope that this episode helps demystify the internship application and interview process to help our student listeners feel more prepared and less stressed. So we're going to try to talk in generalities. Truthfully, everyone's journey will be different. There are very few things that you should do to match for internship and there is no right answer as to how to do all of this. If you have any questions after the episode, remember you can always reach out to advanced students or mentors for guidance, or send us a question at feedback@navneuro.com or tweet [@navneuro](https://twitter.com/navneuro). I'll pass your questions along to John and Ryan. Okay, back to Dr. Penna.

Leslie Gaynor 09:03



[To Dr. Penna] So I wanted to ask you some questions about internship, including internship preparedness, choosing internship sites, and applications, but I wanted to start basic. So Dr. Penna, what is a clinical internship?

Suzanne Penna 09:17



So a clinical internship is typically your very last year of training before you complete your doctorate. It is a clinical training year that is focused on expanding and deepening your skills as a clinical psychologist and/or clinical neuropsychologist.

Leslie Gaynor 09:35



Okay. So for clinical neuropsychology students, what should they expect to get out of internship?

Suzanne Penna 09:41



They should expect to get a ton of training. And really, this is where you put all of your skills that you've learned in grad school into practice. So all of that coursework you've done, all of the practicum sites and the experiences that you have, expect to use all of those skills in a very practical way, over the course of a year. As well as obtaining new skills and perhaps new areas that you are interested in.

Leslie Gaynor 10:04



I think that's a really good point to start at because I think for a lot of our students who are listening, internship is not on the immediate horizon. You know, these listeners might be a year or two away from even beginning to think about internship. So I think a lot of them are wondering what kind of experiences they should be focusing on to make sure that they're prepared for the internship training

experience. So what type of neuropsychology experiences are students expected to have to be considered competitive applicants for a neuropsychology internship?

Suzanne Penna 10:35



I think part of that depends on what type of internship you're going on - whether it be an academic medical center versus a clinic versus a VA - because that is going to vary to some degree. But, in general, you're going to want coursework in neuropsychology, you're going to want practica in neuropsychology, and you're going to want some exposure to research in neuropsychology. And different internship sites are going to weigh those differently, but they're going to be looking for all three.

Leslie Gaynor 11:04



Like you said, there are different types of internships. I know that in 2014 the Clinical Neuropsychology Synarchy defined different levels of emphasis of neuropsychology, which includes major area of study, emphasis, experience, and exposure. Can you talk me through these different levels of neuropsychology-related experience that you were referring to, that can be offered by an internship site?

Suzanne Penna 11:28



Yes. So essentially, for an internship to have neuropsychology is a "major area of study", which is the most neuro of those categories, they have to have at least 50% of their training in neuropsychology, as well as didactic experiences that are consistent with Houston Conference guidelines. So the training has to be specifically neuropsych, as well as the clinical work needs to be specifically neuropsych - at least 50%. As opposed to say an "emphasis", which is the next level down and that's between 30 and 50%. So it's usually, say, one major rotation out of three or something like that. And it has to be supervised by a clinical neuropsychologist. So, you know, you can't have a psychologist doing your neuropsych supervision, it still needs to be a clinical neuropsychologist. Then there's an "experience" on internship, which is between 10 and 30%. And that's usually a minor rotation in neuropsychology. As opposed to "exposure", which is the lowest, which is, like, you might have one case. If you want to be a clinical neuropsychologist as a career, you need to be in an internship that is either a major area of study or an emphasis, the preference being a major area of study in order to be competitive for fellowship.



Leslie Gaynor 12:40

When you're talking about if someone wants to be a neuropsychologist, you're talking about postdoctoral training?



Suzanne Penna 12:46

Yes.



Leslie Gaynor 12:46

Are you talking about keeping licensure and board certification?

Suzanne Penna 12:50



I will admit I'm very biased. I work with one of the former president of ABCN, American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology. So, I'm at a place where everyone is expected to be board certified. I am "all in" on board certification, and I think that the field is moving that way. I think that soon that is going to be the standard for our profession. So I'm under the assumption that anybody who wants to be a neuropsychologist will also be pursuing board certification.



Leslie Gaynor 13:21

Okay.

Suzanne Penna 13:22



So that's my bias. So, you know, your mileage may vary. Basically if you want to be a neuropsychologist as a profession, you should go to an internship that either has neuropsychology as an emphasis or a major area of study. Once you do that, you would be competitive for a clinical neuropsychology fellowship. So that's the next hoop to jump through. Unfortunately, that's the downside with clinical neuropsychology - there's a lot of hoops. I prefer to think of it as many opportunities to refine and hone your training. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 13:59

That's a really good way to look at it. [laughs] It keeps it positive. So what about non-neuropsychological clinical experience, like psychological intervention?



Suzanne Penna 14:09

Oh, yeah. You definitely need that, too.



Leslie Gaynor 14:11

Okay.

Suzanne Penna 14:12

So you can't, you know - it's that whole retirement strategy: don't put all your eggs in one basket. You do need general clinical skills. That's essential to being a good neuropsychologist. Even if you have no interest in ever doing therapy with anyone ever again the second you leave training, you still need to have those clinical skills. Some of the worst neuropsychologists I've ever seen are people that don't have those clinical skills or don't have that, you know, fundamental interpersonal communication. So, absolutely. And internships are supposed to be largely generalist training. So you can't have a 100% neuropsych internship. Even if you want that, it does not exist. It won't get accredited by APA. You need that generalist framework because everything builds from that.



Leslie Gaynor 15:01

Okay.

Suzanne Penna 15:02

You know, I knew I wanted to be a neuropsychologist by the time I was on internship. My training was probably 70% neuropsych and then 30% severe and persistent mental illness, which I dreaded and I did not want to do, and then I loved it - I mean love, love, love, love, loved it. And I did not expect to love it. Clinical work? You need it every day. So you've got to have that background, too.



Leslie Gaynor 15:28

Right.



Suzanne Penna 15:29

So it's not either/or, it's and.



Leslie Gaynor 15:32

Okay. Another thing students might be doing is research.



Suzanne Penna 15:36

Yes.

Leslie Gaynor 15:36



And I think it's kind of paradoxical. Although internship is a clinical year, there is a lot of emphasis on research - you know, there's a research essay that you have to write for your internship application, you're going to be asked about the process of your dissertation. So how much do you think students should focus on research and gaining research experience in graduate school in order to prepare for internship?

Suzanne Penna 16:01



I think, again, it depends on your career trajectory, which is hard, because, you know, it's very hard. When you're in graduate school, you just think, "At some point, I'm going to be a grown up, but I don't know when the point is going to be." So it is hard to kind of work backwards and think, "Okay, where do I ultimately want to end up?" I would say that if you want to have a career in an academic medical center, it is essential. You really, really have to have research experience because that's going to be part of any academic career that you're going to be eligible for. The first thing they're going to look at is your research. We have a lot of people here at the Emory practicum that come from PsyD programs and their question is, "Well, you know, we don't really have research as a strong part of our training. Like, this is really an applied degree." To which I would say, "That's fine, but you still need to get research somewhere." If you want to be in an academic medical research program or in a hospital, you're still going to need it.

Leslie Gaynor 16:59



Okay. And that doesn't necessarily mean, you know, 100 first author publications?

Suzanne Penna 17:04



Oh, God, no.

Leslie Gaynor 17:05



Okay.

Suzanne Penna 17:05



No. I think another reason why we have that essay - one is, again, you know, there are a good portion of people that go into academics and research is a core foundation of that. But also, can you think logically? Can you describe what it is that you're investigating in clear and concise ways? Can you be a skilled consumer of

the research out there? Because even practitioners need to be able to critically evaluate research.



Leslie Gaynor 17:35

Right.



Suzanne Penna 17:35

Right. And if you don't know how to do research, then you can't critically evaluate it. So that's why I would argue that you still need that experience. It's not enough just to take a class.



Leslie Gaynor 17:45

Do any of the factors that you discuss differ when someone's interested in adult, pediatric, or lifespan neuropsychology?



Suzanne Penna 17:54

I mean, obviously, if you know you're going to be a peds neuropsychologist and you're only coming in with adult practica, people are going to look at you a little oddly, you know, and like, "What's that all about?" So you do want things to sort of hang together. If you know that you're into geriatrics, you should have practica in geriatrics. I mean, you can also have one in pediatric neuropsychology, absolutely. But there should be a clear focus in that direction so it doesn't look like it's coming out of the clear blue sky when somebody is reviewing your CV. You know, lifespan? Have an adult practicum, have a peds practicum. If that's not available, maybe try to get it as a therapy practicum. You just want exposure to whatever group that you're interested in.



Leslie Gaynor 18:35

And I know pediatric neuropsychology does have a stronger emphasis on intervention training.



Suzanne Penna 18:41

Yes, it does.



Leslie Gaynor 18:41

Right.



Suzanne Penna 18:42

Very much so. Because a lot of what you're doing with children - it's not just, "Okay, what's going on?" They have malleable brains, let's do something with this while we can. Absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 18:53

What do you think are personal attributes and characteristics that you find important for an applicant?



Suzanne Penna 18:59

Well, I think, obviously, the desire to be a neuropsychologist is way up there, because I feel like people either love it or hate it. If you love it, that's great. That's the first step. But the second step is to be precise and to be detail oriented. Because you really need to be precise. At the heart of what we do is assessment, and we look at psychometrics, and we look at validity, and we are highly detail-oriented. So, you know, having a little Type A obsessiveness is not necessarily a bad thing in a neuropsychologist. Too much obviously is. But being scrupulous is something that's important, I would say.



Leslie Gaynor 19:43

I think a lot of our students will feel reassured to hear that is an encouraged quality.



Suzanne Penna 19:49

Oh, yeah. I mean, we're all like just, you know, basically nitpickers at heart. I mean, like, we sit here and pore over data like we're reading tea leaves.



Leslie Gaynor 19:59

[laughs] Are there any other experiences I'm missing that you look for in a graduate student?



Suzanne Penna 20:05

No, I think we're looking for somebody who's relatively well-rounded in terms of having a balance of clinical practicum, having a balance of research. And, obviously, some people are geared to this - like, if somebody is going for a research career, it's going to be very clear in their packet that that's where they're going. Just really having a sense of how you're going to tell your story. Even if you're really not sure yet - even if you have to make up a story, make up a story. I think that that's probably something to foster. And I think intellectual curiosity goes a long way.



Leslie Gaynor 20:36

Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 20:37

You know, people who are interested and engaged in this stuff. I want somebody who's passionate about it.



Leslie Gaynor 20:42

Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 20:43

Yeah!



Leslie Gaynor 20:43

So you mentioned that people are going to be pursuing practica experiences during graduate school. As much as we enjoy our practica, no one enjoys tracking hours.



Suzanne Penna 20:53

Oh, God, yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 20:55

So what kind of information should students be tracking? Since they do have to for APPIC hours reporting.



Suzanne Penna 21:01

Well, they did not have Time2Track when I was in grad school. I think they have it now. I think that makes life easier. I'm not sure if programs use it. Did your program use that?



Leslie Gaynor 21:10

No, not at the time I was there.



Suzanne Penna 21:12

Okay. I would like to be a shining example to everybody out there of what not to do. I did not start tracking my hours until about a month before I applied for internship. And I was literally freaking out. I was counting old neuropsych reports, going through them and writing down which tests I used. So this is where the

obsessiveness is not perhaps in your best interest. My advice would be to start early. For each practicum, give yourself a spreadsheet and have a different tab on the spreadsheet for each practicum, and just record who you saw, the number of times you saw them - that type of thing. Honestly, chances are the APPIC application is not going to change significantly by the time people are ready for grad school. I mean, even if you're in your first or second year, chances are it's not going to change hugely in like five or six years. Go ahead and download that and see what they ask for and start filling in the information.



Leslie Gaynor 22:13

That's smart.



Suzanne Penna 22:14

Yeah. I mean, because it was like - oh, that was rough. I do not recommend doing what I did. I think that's how I got my first gray hair. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 22:22

I won't make you go back to that mental space. [laughs]



Suzanne Penna 22:25

Please don't make me. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 22:26

Just do track your hours and do track information about your patients - their diversity, the number of times you saw them, the type of tests that you gave. Definitely tests, including subtests.



Suzanne Penna 22:38

And your clinical skills, too. There's a whole section on clinical skills - how many couples did you do? How many groups did you do? How many kids did you see? How many geriatric folks did you see?



Leslie Gaynor 22:48

What settings?



Suzanne Penna 22:49

Exactly. All of those things are going to be - you're going to need to record them. Whether or not they're looked at is one thing, but you do still need to record them.

Leslie Gaynor 22:59



I'll be asking you a little bit more about what part of the application matters later - so that's a good note to leave for that point. I wanted to then move forward to choosing internship sites to apply to. I think that was the hardest part of the process, just going through pages of available training sites on the APPIC website and finding it nearly impossible to eliminate options.

Suzanne Penna 23:23



Totally.

Leslie Gaynor 23:23



So how do you recommend students choose?

Suzanne Penna 23:26



This is tough. This is really, really tough. I think there are a lot of factors that are involved. The most salient ones are really - if you think of it like Maslow's hierarchy of needs - are, if you have reasons that you have to be in a particular place, that necessarily limits you. I would say that's unfortunate. Because again, neuropsych internships, there are many of them, but they're not as many when you compare them to the general sort of clinical internships out there. So if you have to be in a particular location, obviously, that's going to be your main criteria. That being aside, if there is any way to not restrict yourself, it would be to your benefit. I would argue that you can do anything for a year. You can live anywhere for a year. Even if you really don't want to, you can do it. My now husband and then boyfriend, we were apart for a year and it was not fantastic, but it was fine. It was fine for a year. A lot of people do go by region - you know, "I want the coasts" or "I need to be in California because I know I want to live there and that might make fellowships easier." So one consideration is fellowship. Some places do tend to like their own. Some places like to know that you've had experience in that region. Not all places do, though.

Leslie Gaynor 24:51



Okay.



Suzanne Penna 24:51

So that's a factor but not really. I think the best factor is which places are going to meet your training needs. And then how to find them. So the APPIC site would be the last site that I go to maybe - maybe the first and the last. I would look at the Clinical Synarchy website, so Division 40. The SCN Division 40 has a listing of neuroscience internships. AITCN, the Association of Internship Training in Clinical Neuropsychology, has a list of neuropsychology internships. Let's see. So Division 40, SCN, AITCN. Asking people in your program where they've applied. That would probably be my number one. Not just the year before you but two years before you - so asking the whole neuropsychology cohort, where are the places that you've looked at before. Start there.



Leslie Gaynor 25:44

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 25:45

And then once you get your list, and I'm guessing there's going to be like 25 or 30 names on it, then go to the APPIC site and look to see if it meets what you're looking for or not.



Leslie Gaynor 25:54

And why would you recommend looking at past students and where they applied?



Suzanne Penna 25:59

Oh, I mean, I think one, they can tell you about a place, particularly if they interviewed there. They can give you the scoop more than any description can. Because, you know, I'll be honest, all these places start to sound the same after a while, particularly for the major rotations. It's like, okay, you know, major rotation with people with known or suspected brain injury in an outpatient setting, check, check, check. So having somebody who can really give you a feel for a place is invaluable. So I would always go with people who have already been there and done that.



Leslie Gaynor 26:33

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 26:34

Always.



Leslie Gaynor 26:35

Yeah, I do think that's really good advice. That's definitely something that I did. If you don't have any students at your program who are interested in neuropsychology, I reached out to some people that I'd met during interviews for graduate school and that was also helpful to get a different perspective.



Suzanne Penna 26:51

That's a really good idea. And then ANST, the Association of Neuropsychology Students in Training, is a great resource. You can even get on the listserv and just kind of say, "Can somebody backchannel me about, you know, X, Y, or Z?" And knowing, obviously, that people's mileage may vary. And people may experience one place entirely differently than another place. But getting some information is really, really helpful.



Leslie Gaynor 27:18

I think that is especially helpful advice with all of the different internship settings. Because I do think in graduate school we're often restricted to experiences in one kind or the other.



Suzanne Penna 27:28

Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 27:28

As you mentioned earlier, there are different site options - like academic medical centers, VA medical centers, consortiums, private hospitals - can you tell me a little bit about each setting?



Suzanne Penna 27:39

So the internship that I'm the training director for is an academic medical center. So obviously I have the most experience with that. But all internships are a clinical year. No matter what, your focus is going to be on clinical work. Even if it's a heavy research university, it's still a clinical year. Typically what varies is the patient population and the types of people that you'll see. So at VAs, you're going to tend to see more of a dual cohort - you're going to see a Vietnam era cohort who are in the, I would say, dementia category, they will most likely be men, they will most likely be a lower SES. And then you're probably going to see another cohort of people who are OEF/OIF veterans, so a younger, I would say 30 to 40 years cohort as well. That's going to be your primary group unless you really seek out some specific

training at, like, an all female mental health department or something like that. In academic medical centers, again, you're going to see probably a greater variety of cognitive impairment. You're going to see a more medical population - so more of your traditional dementia, Parkinson's, neurodegenerative, MS, traumatic brain injury, stroke, those sorts of things. You will probably not see a lot of things like learning disabilities or ADHD evals, things like that. You're much more likely to see that in a more community setting.



Leslie Gaynor 29:00

Okay.

Suzanne Penna 29:00



You may see more forensics in a community setting. Some hospitals do more forensics, some don't. I know our site doesn't only because my cohort and I avoid it like the plague. [laughs] But in other places that might be a part of things.

Consortiums will probably, again, offer a combination of those. So you can get a lot of different experiences in multiple settings.



Leslie Gaynor 29:23

And then you were mentioning community centers, would you equate that to a private hospital?



Suzanne Penna 29:27

Yes, probably so. So there you might see more severe and persistent mental illness. You might see, again, some more dementia, those types of things. But maybe less of your classic neurological impairments.



Leslie Gaynor 29:42

A question I hear a lot when people are choosing what kind of populations they want to work with is, "Should I be doing a deeper dive into the kind of populations I've already seen?" You know, "My research focus is dementia. Should I be working with dementia clinically? Or should I be getting a new experience in a totally different population?"



Suzanne Penna 30:01

Yes to both. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 30:02

Okay. Easy answers here.



Suzanne Penna 30:05

Let's just put it this way. Let's say you've gone to school and you want to be a pediatric neuropsychologist and you've done autism, and you've worked in autism clinics, and your research is in autism, and you have multiple practicum in autism, but you really don't want to see autism for the rest of your life, you want to also go and see other things - at that point, do other things.



Leslie Gaynor 30:26

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 30:27

But if you think, "Okay, this is a population that I want to continue working with. And it's not just something that I did because this is what my grad student mentor is doing and I need to get out of here." Then yes, you would want to do a well-rounded pediatric experience, but to make sure that at least one of your rotations is still with that population that you want to work with.



Leslie Gaynor 30:45

Right.



Suzanne Penna 30:45

Yeah. But I will say that internship is a time to flesh out experiences that you haven't had before. Like I said, I'm so glad I had that experience with inpatient psychiatric, you know, severe and persistent mental illness. It was awesome, and terrifying, and awesome. But after I was done, I feel like there is nothing I can't handle.



Leslie Gaynor 31:04

Right.



Suzanne Penna 31:05

And it was something that I didn't know I was missing until I saw it. And I'm like, "Oh, got it!"



Leslie Gaynor 31:11

Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 31:11

So I would encourage people to use that as an opportunity. You know, still do what you want to do, have that as part of your focus. But it shouldn't be your only focus.



Leslie Gaynor 31:21

You don't have to decide everything by internship.



Suzanne Penna 31:23

You do not. Fellowship? That's kind of a different animal. Something to talk about for another day.



Leslie Gaynor 31:28

Yeah, yeah, we might have to talk about that.



Suzanne Penna 31:30

Exactly.



Leslie Gaynor 31:32

Some sites also offer protected research hours, typically 4 to 8 hours per week. Why would this be beneficial to a student while on internship?



Suzanne Penna 31:41

Well, for multiple reasons. First and foremost, if you're not done with your dissertation, you are going to need that time. So that would be a glorious thing. I think that there is a recognition that some people are really researchers at heart - that's all they want to do. That this is sort of their last clinical experience that they're going to do and to hold on to those "research chops", so to speak. You know, that can be something to do. Even on internship, research doesn't always stop - people have projects that they're doing, things that they're engaged in. So it can be helpful to have. If you're not a researcher and you have that protected research time and your dissertation is done, great time to write reports.



Leslie Gaynor 32:23

There's always more time for report writing.



Suzanne Penna 32:26

Exactly.



Leslie Gaynor 32:27

Do the research-oriented sites typically look for applicants who have significant research experience from their graduate school training?



Suzanne Penna 32:34

I would say so. You know, it's not the be all and end all but it is probably weighted more heavily than say, an internship site that is not strongly research focused. Our internship here at Emory is not heavily research focused, but all of the faculty here have very active research programs. Usually the interns here are, at least, submitting a poster presentation to INS or AACN. We look at it. We look at research productivity, absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 33:00

What kind of didactic experiences are typically offered by neuropsychology internships?



Suzanne Penna 33:05

Again, I think that depends on the setting. So you are going to look for ones that are consistent with Houston Conference guidelines. So you're going to want things that are very neuropsychology specific - so journal clubs, case seminars, didactics involving knowledge of neuropsychological syndromes, common syndromes and classic syndromes that you see. In hospital settings, and this includes VA as well as academic medical settings, having exposure to say neurology grand rounds, neurosurgery grand rounds, neuroradiology, psychiatry grand rounds, brain cutting, those sorts of things. You're going to want very neuro-focused ones. You're also going to want generalist didactics, as well, which any APA-accredited internship will offer. But that shouldn't be your only didactics that you're exposed to. You're going to want neuropsych specific ones as well.



Leslie Gaynor 33:55

So a mix of those. And it does sound like there are a lot of options based on your site.

Suzanne Penna 34:00



And I think it's important to ask because a lot of times even though it might not be part of the internship, it still might be available. A lot of times internships will share didactics or you can say, "Hey, I saw this thing that looks interesting to me, would there be time in my schedule to do it?" And there may be flexibility to have that.

Leslie Gaynor 34:16



I wanted to circle back. You had mentioned previously that some sites offer postdoctoral fellowships, and some sites do look at their interns to fill those fellowships. But obviously, some sites don't or sometimes you're attending internship on an off year.

Suzanne Penna 34:32



Right.

Leslie Gaynor 34:33



What would you say to students who either are interested in or match to an internship that does not have a postdoctoral fellowship? How should they start thinking about the next year because they're going to have to start applying to postdoc very quickly.

Suzanne Penna 34:48



I know. It's so miserable because you just go through the whole internship process and then you turn around and you just get settled on internship and you feel like, "Okay, I know what I'm doing." And they're like, "Have you thought about fellowship? Let's start applying!"

Leslie Gaynor 35:00



Right.

Suzanne Penna 35:01



Honestly, going to an internship that doesn't have a fellowship or going on an off year is not nearly as big of a deal as students seem to think it is. It just really isn't. I think, for fellowship, that's where it's time to kind of get serious. "Okay, professionally, what is it that I want to do?" And I will also say in fellowship, I think geography does become more of a factor than it did before - A) you're going to be in a place for two years, but B) a lot of times people hire directly out of fellowship locally. So if you know you want to be in a particular part of the country - "I want to

be in New England" - it might be in your best interest to attend a fellowship in New England. But again, not a deal breaker. I mean, I did a fellowship in Alabama and I ended up in DC. So your mileage may vary.



Leslie Gaynor 35:48

Yeah, I like that as the catchphrase of the episode.



Suzanne Penna 35:51

Yeah! [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 35:51

But I do think that's really helpful. It is also helpful for intern students who might end up in a part of the country they weren't planning on.



Suzanne Penna 36:00

Location does not matter for internship. It really, really doesn't. Where are you going to get the best training for you? Hands down, that's the most important thing for internship. Fellowship? You've got to think about those external factors. Internship, you really should be focusing on filling the holes in your training and deepening your expertise in the area where you want to be.



Leslie Gaynor 36:19

So we've given the listeners a lot to think about in terms of how to pick sites they would like to apply to. There's also the question of APA accreditation.



Suzanne Penna 36:27

Yes.



Leslie Gaynor 36:28

Is this important?



Suzanne Penna 36:29

Yes!



Leslie Gaynor 36:30

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 36:30

Do not go to an internship that is not APA accredited. Basically, you won't be able to get a job at a VA ever. You have to go to an APA accredited internship.



Leslie Gaynor 36:40

Okay. What about CPA accreditation for Canadian students?

Suzanne Penna 36:44

That should be fine if they're American citizens and they want to work at a VA.



That's probably something I actually don't have specialized knowledge about, but that would be sort of a tweak. But I'm sure if you talk to any VA training director, they would tell you. But typically CPA and APA, most places are jointly accredited. So it's a non issue.



Leslie Gaynor 37:05

Okay. And then I know some sites have APPIC certification, and not APA or CPA accreditation. Is this the same thing? Does it carry the same weight?



Suzanne Penna 37:16

It does not. So what you're looking for is APA accreditation. So, there's regional accreditation, which I believe is what APPIC is, but you want APA.



Leslie Gaynor 37:27

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 37:28

Yep. And that's what you're looking for.



Leslie Gaynor 37:30

That's what we're looking for. That's your benchmark.



Suzanne Penna 37:32

Yep.



Leslie Gaynor 37:32

And then we do have a lot of international listeners so I wondered if you had any advice for international neuropsychology students about how they should approach the APPIC application and interview process.



Suzanne Penna 37:44

For internship, proceed as normal because technically you are still a pre-doctoral intern. So in terms of a visa status, you're still a student. It becomes a lot trickier during fellowship, because then you are no longer technically a student anymore, because it is a post-doctoral fellowship. So this becomes a lot trickier for international students at the fellowship level. At internship, it's just like it's always been - if you have a student visa, that's all you need.



Leslie Gaynor 38:13

So in the end, now, we've guided all of these students...



Suzanne Penna 38:17

Oh, boy...



Leslie Gaynor 38:18

...through picking internship sites to apply to. How many sites should they have picked?



Suzanne Penna 38:24

Oh, boy. I think the going rate now is like 12 to 15 or so. I think that's what most people are doing. I wouldn't do less than 10. Unless, you know, again, you've got something like geography as a deal breaker for you. I mean, then obviously, it does make your chances of not matching higher. I know that some programs will really push people to apply to like 20 or 30 sites. I think that's just stressful and expensive.



Leslie Gaynor 38:51

The advice does really vary. It does really vary what students can handle because you have to think this is a financial burden. Every application costs money.



Suzanne Penna 39:00

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think it's one of the reasons actually I'm thrilled this year that interviews are going to be by and large by Zoom. You know, I have sort of been

advocating for this for many years. It's an irresponsible financial burden to have students fly across the country to interview at all of these different sites. I mean, I am still digging out of the hole that I went into financially when I interviewed for internships back in 2003. Never had credit card debt before then, and I've never gotten out of it since. I mean, granted, there were other things that I spent money on, but it's a lot of money. It's a lot of time, it's a lot of expense.

Leslie Gaynor 39:38



So for students who are getting the advice to apply to 20 sites and they feel financially limited, you think it's okay to apply to fewer sites? To apply to as few as 10?

Suzanne Penna 39:49



I mean, again, I think it depends on how strong your application is, though. If you know that, "Okay, I want a major area of study internship. But my training is not necessarily commensurate with that", then you might want to interview at more sites. But if you already know, "Okay, I've taken four or five neuropsychology courses. I've done two to three neuropsych practicum and in varying settings. My dissertation is neuropsych related," then yes, you can probably get away with going to fewer. So I do think it depends a lot on your prior training experiences.

Leslie Gaynor 40:27



There's a lot of "it depends" for this episode.

Suzanne Penna 40:30



There is, there is. Yeah, there are a lot of individual things that go into it. If you have a mentor, use your mentor. If you don't have a mentor, find a mentor. Even if it's an older grad student who has sort of "been there, done that", it can be really, really helpful. But know what you want, and then work backwards from there.

Leslie Gaynor 40:51



So Dr. Penna, before we get into internship application materials, I just wanted to underline something that you said throughout these questions, which is that there are a lot of dependings. There are going to be a lot of differences in why students choose the kind of internship experience they choose and I just wanted to ask you in order to emphasize this - is that okay?



Suzanne Penna 41:14

Absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 41:15

Is it okay to want something different from your cohort? Or what your mentor wants?



Suzanne Penna 41:20

Absolutely. I mean, this is ultimately your life, your career. You know, you may have your own reasons for needing to be at a particular type of place, or a particular location. Typically, by the time you're going to internship, most people are in their late 20s, some early 30s - you've got a life, you want to settle down. Some people may have spouses and children that they cannot leave, or, you know, adult family members that they may be caring for. So yeah, I mean, it's definitely something that you have to take into consideration. If it's something that you have to do, you should do it with no guilt about it. No question. You know, if you can go anywhere you want to get the best training for you, then that's great, but I also acknowledge that that's a luxury that not everybody has.



Leslie Gaynor 42:10

Thank you. I'm sure a lot of students will be reassured to hear that because there is a lot of pressure to go to a certain site.



Suzanne Penna 42:18

Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 42:18

Or to have a site with a certain name.



Suzanne Penna 42:21

Right. I will use myself once again as an example perhaps of what not to do. And this is probably too much information, but I'm going to say it anyway. So I was in a 5-year relationship when internship rolled around and my boyfriend was dragging his feet. And I was like, "You know what, we either need to get married or we need to break up." So my criteria for internship was it had to be a location that we could not drive to.



Leslie Gaynor 42:48

Wow, I love it.



Suzanne Penna 42:48

So I was like, this is it. We are going to get married by the end of this or we are breaking up and he is going to have to fly to get to me. And that was my main criteria in the places that I chose. Only one place I interviewed at was within a driving distance for me and that was a six hour drive. So there you go. [laughs]



Leslie Gaynor 43:10

There you go. So, actually, just wipe everything we said before. The criteria for which internship you should choose is: it should not be within driving distance of your boyfriend or girlfriend or partner.



Suzanne Penna 43:21

If they are taking too long to make up their minds about where the relationship is headed.



Leslie Gaynor 43:25

Asterisk. Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 43:26

Asterisk. There you go. Long story short, yeah, we've been married now for 13 years. So.



Leslie Gaynor 43:32

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 43:32

It worked!



Leslie Gaynor 43:33

It worked! So pick your criteria.



Suzanne Penna 43:35

Right.



Leslie Gaynor 43:36

From the list above or other things. [laughs] Well, I'm going to presume now that our listeners have completed several neuropsychology practica and doctoral research projects, they have perused the APPIC internship site list and have selected a number of sites where they will send applications. So now it would be time for them to sit down and complete their applications.



Suzanne Penna 43:57

Yes.



Leslie Gaynor 43:58

When should students begin to think about internship applications and how would you recommend they start?



Suzanne Penna 44:04

I think the time to - let's say this is the year you're going to apply, you should already have a working list. I would say the summer before you're going to apply, start your research on where you're interested in. Talk to people who've just been through the process before you. Start collecting your information. Start looking through. If you haven't done so already, get your hours together [laughs]. Download the application because it's long, it's very thorough. I developed a serious aversion to it. So it's good to slowly kind of expose yourself to it - so we're doing some prolonged exposure with the actual application. You know, go through it once and then put it away and don't look at it for another several days. Maybe have a glass of wine and then go through it again. Take it piece by piece. Do it that way rather than just sitting down and doing it in a huge chunk.



Leslie Gaynor 45:04

Yeah, I would also recommend that. No barreling through. Try to pick a couple hours here and there to start picking away at that application. When should students ask for letters of recommendation? Is that around the same time?



Suzanne Penna 45:18

Again, work backwards to when they are due. I believe typically applications are due, I want to say, November - like, the 1st or 2nd of November.



Leslie Gaynor 45:27

Or the 15th?

Suzanne Penna 45:28



Yeah, somewhere around there. Okay. So look to see on your sites, when is the earliest deadline. And then you're going to want those letters back at least a week before then, knowing that some of your letter writers are going to leave it to the very last minute - through no fault of their own. [laughs] But give yourself padding because this way you won't be hounding them at the very last second and you will keep your sanity to some degree. So I would probably give them six weeks to a month to write it for you. So start with the earliest deadline, you want it done a week before that, and then count backwards a month to six weeks before then, that's when you want to ask them.

Leslie Gaynor 46:12



In terms of recommendation letters, what do they contribute to a student's internship application? Because I think that's helpful information when you're choosing who should write your letter.

Suzanne Penna 46:22



Absolutely. Neuropsychology is a very small world, we all kind of know each other. Getting a letter from somebody who is known in the field, carries some weight, unless it's a lukewarm letter. So I would say, for sure you're going to want a letter from your dissertation advisor. Because that's somebody who can speak about your research, about your capacity for research, and also your ability to - like I said, even if you're coming from a program that does not emphasize research, how well you can think critically about the research literature. Because you still need to be an informed consumer. So you want somebody who can speak to that. Absolutely have one of them be your grad school advisor, who is typically your dissertation chair, sometimes it's not. I would probably get at least one letter from a practicum site. So if people have three letters, they may take two people from their graduate program and one from a clinical practicum. Some people do one from the graduate site and two from two different clinical practicum. So I would do it that way. So yes, name recognition helps. But if you never actually really worked with the person, it's not going to help that much. You want somebody who knows you well to write that letter. That's going to be key, more than anything else. You know, somebody who really knows you and what you're capable of, because that's what comes through in the letter.

Leslie Gaynor 47:46



Okay, it sounds like they contribute to the internship site's ability to know who you are.



Suzanne Penna 47:53

Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 47:53

And how you are to work with?



Suzanne Penna 47:55

Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, you know, now the letters are very formalized. APA has a specific style - it's only two pages, you know.



Leslie Gaynor 48:03

Right.



Suzanne Penna 48:03

Right. So that's interesting. But it's even more important that you get somebody that knows you well, because you don't want a generic answer to a generic question.



Leslie Gaynor 48:12

Oh, I didn't even think about that as a flaw of that system.



Suzanne Penna 48:18

Well, and I think it's because so many recommendations were like, "This person is a shining star!", and you didn't get any sense of them as a person. So they did want people to address strengths and weaknesses. Anytime you try to formalize or standardize something, you do lose a little bit of nuance.



Leslie Gaynor 48:34

So pick someone who knows your nuance?



Suzanne Penna 48:36

Yes, very much so.



Leslie Gaynor 48:38

Let's talk about essays.



Suzanne Penna 48:40

Yes, let's talk about essays!



Leslie Gaynor 48:42

There are four different essays. I remember hearing that and feeling a little paralyzed. But there are four that students will write as part of their internship application. Can you tell me a little bit about each essay in terms of topic and makeup?



Suzanne Penna 48:55

Yes. So you've got four essays. The first one, I think, causes the most angst. That is a "Tell me about yourself" essay - like it's sort of an autobiographical statement. So it can really be about anything and to have such an open-ended question freaks people out. That's the one where people really struggle with more than anything else. So that's essay one. There's going to be an essay about multiculturalism - you know, your experiences with diversity and how you integrate that in your clinical work. There's going to be one about research. And again, even if you are not a researcher, they're still going to ask you about research interests, research topics, what your final project was on, something like that - so being able to talk critically about it. What's the fourth one that I'm missing?



Leslie Gaynor 49:45

Clinical?



Suzanne Penna 49:47

Oh, right, your clinical work. Right. Absolutely. Because arguably, that is, you know, what you're going to internship for. So yes, absolutely. So people talk about their clinical orientation, and why they are clinically oriented in the way that they are, and then how they integrate that in with their therapy or assessment.



Leslie Gaynor 50:06

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 50:07

Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 50:08

So do you have any advice for students in terms of writing these essays? Some people say, make this a reiteration of your CV. And other people say that this can be your place to shine with your personality.



Suzanne Penna 50:22

So, I think, again, different training directors may look for different things. I would argue that the place to really reiterate and emphasize your CV is your cover letter. The place to give me a sense of who you are as a person should be your essays. There is nothing worse than reading an essay that is literally a listing of what's in the CV and the cover letter. I'm like, I've just read the exact same thing three times and I still have no idea who this person is as a person.



Leslie Gaynor 50:48

Oh, so you're really looking for who they are?



Suzanne Penna 50:50

Me, personally, yes. I know other people weigh things differently. I love essay number one. That's my favorite, that's the one I always read. Not to put any pressure on people to make it like a work of art or anything. I mean, if you've had a normal life and you want to talk about how you got into neuropsychology, yes, do that. Because everybody's story is different and it's still interesting. Even if people are like, "Well I'm not that interesting and I haven't done any interesting things." I'm like, "What are you talking about? You're in grad school for clinical neuropsychology, and your research is in X. How did you come to this?" Like, "What about this excites you?" Give me a sense of what lights a fire under you. Be it neuropsych, be it something else. Tie it in. I mean, I wouldn't say go completely off the wall or weird. But there've been at least three interns at Emory that we have interviewed strictly on the strength of that first essay.



Leslie Gaynor 51:43

Really?



Suzanne Penna 51:44

Really. The other areas, you know, they may have just sort of been completely overlooked.

Leslie Gaynor 51:51



Wow. So I will circle back to the point you're making about which part of the application is important, but it sounds like the essays are a place where you can shine.

Suzanne Penna 52:01



Yes.

Leslie Gaynor 52:01



You know, students can take that time to explain what they're doing here. Why they're applying for internship. I did think it was helpful for me to use the essays to figure that out.

Suzanne Penna 52:12



Yeah. I mean, I like the research essay because it shows me how you think. Because dissertations get very complex, and you're like wading through this minutia of stuff. Can you explain it to me, who doesn't have any experience with it, so I understand it? So I understand what you're looking at, and how you're going to go about it, and what you found from it? Can you think clearly? Can you write clearly? Because as a neuropsychologist, you need to be able to write clearly. I want you to basically lay something out so I can follow it. Same thing with diversity experiences, same thing with your therapy. I get that a lot of neuropsychologists avoid psychotherapy like the plague. But how do you think in a therapeutic way? What orientation do you gravitate to? Why does this resonate with you? Because again, this tells me about you. Even if that's not an orientation I practice, why is it interesting to you? How do you use it? So I want to see, can you take a theory and can you apply it to the real world? Because arguably, that's what you're doing in internship. It's taking everything you're learning in grad school and applying it to the real world.

Leslie Gaynor 53:16



Yeah, and what you're talking about sounds like all skills that students would have built as fourth or fifth year or sixth year students applying for internship. So it's not like you're asking them to be professors or licensed clinicians.

Suzanne Penna 53:30



Or to be Shakespeare. Just give me a sense - like, when I'm done reading it, let me have some idea of who you are, as a student or a person.



Leslie Gaynor 53:39

Okay.



Suzanne Penna 53:40

Yeah, that's it. And don't make egregious misspellings. Have somebody check those suckers over.



Leslie Gaynor 53:46

Is there anything else that you should not do in your essay?



Suzanne Penna 53:50

Don't be crazy. Don't let your crazy show. I mean, still be professional. Like, let me know who you are, but probably not a good idea to talk about your personal experiences in psychotherapy or your uncle who believes he's St. Jerome, unless that was your reason for going into it. I want to know who you are as a person, but I also want to know that you're a person who has their act together. Does that make sense?



Leslie Gaynor 54:15

Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 54:16

And a person who is not going to freak out under the demands of internship.



Leslie Gaynor 54:20

Okay. So tell me a little bit about that cover letter.



Suzanne Penna 54:24

Alright, so your cover letter. Usually it's around one or two pages and in it, what you want to do is highlight the things that make you stand out from other people. So all the really cool things that are buried in your CV that you know like the back of your hand, bring them out and talk about it. So, okay, here's who I am, this is the program that I'm in, here are the practicum that I've done, here the settings that I've done them in. So you're going to show the range of experiences that you've had, and then you're going to say how these experiences will fit in the place where you're applying. So you want to make it feel like you are a good fit for the internship you're applying to. So this is where you may want to highlight some things, not highlight other things. Or if you do decide that, "You know what, I'm applying to this

VA and I have no VA experience” - which by the way is not a deal breaker, at all - you can say, “I've always wanted to work in this population and because I have experience in this community health center, I feel that this is going to segue nicely into the veteran population.” So this is where you cherry pick your experiences in your CV to match what the internship site is, and to say what you still are looking for from a particular site. Because if they feel like, “All right, we have nothing to offer this person because they've already done everything that we offer”, that's going to be less interesting. But if you say, “Okay, I've done these things, which make me compatible with the site, and here are the extra things that I don't have that I want to get,” that makes you look really, really good to that internship site.



Leslie Gaynor 56:00

So you're presenting both strengths, and what some people might call weaknesses or gaps in your training.



Suzanne Penna 56:07

Growth areas. I would call those growth areas. So not only will I succeed at this internship, this internship will also broaden my training in these ways.



Leslie Gaynor 56:17

Another good reminder that you're not fully baked by the time you apply for internships. That you're still allowed to have growth areas.



Suzanne Penna 56:24

Absolutely, absolutely. Of course, nobody is expecting you to have everything. I mean, when you look at the APPIC application, you're gonna laugh. You're like, “No, I've never done a group before. I've never seen a whole family for cognitive rehab”. They don't expect you to, that's fine. You know, no big deal. So again, highlight what you have done, highlight what you're looking for. Try not to have your first essay be a carbon copy of that cover letter.



Leslie Gaynor 56:53

Okay, so let that stand as the element of your application that's more specific to the site that lets the site know that you've perused their material.



Suzanne Penna 57:03

Yes. Right. And make sure you've got the most updated materials. Like, “I can't wait to work with Professor So and So”, who left that site five years ago. The site wants -

you're kind of massaging the site - the site wants to feel like you're choosing them because they're special. The people there have egos, too. They want to know that you are applying to them because you're interested in them, not because you're applying to 15 sites and you've got to stay within the tri state area. Even if that's the truth, they don't need to know that. You can know that, they don't need to know that.



Leslie Gaynor 57:39

But that brings up two questions for me, actually, because I had heard that it was okay to bring up that you were happy with the geographic location.



Suzanne Penna 57:50

Absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 57:50

To emphasize, you know, I would attend this site. I would rank this site highly, because I like the location.



Suzanne Penna 57:56

Yeah. You can say, you know, geographically being in this particular area is important for me for X, Y, or Z. You can either say what that is, or you can just say, personally, I want to be in this area. That's completely legit. That's fine.



Leslie Gaynor 58:12

Okay, just as long as it's not the whole essay, or the dearth of information is reflecting that you are just picking it basically because of the location and you could care less what kind of training they do.



Suzanne Penna 58:22

Exactly, exactly. Even if that's true, which it shouldn't be just for your own sake, I would hope that you wouldn't restrict yourself in that way. But...



Leslie Gaynor 58:32

And then the other question that brought up for me was, I've gotten questions about how much excitement you can convey. And this is throughout the application process. But I do think this applies to cover letters. You know, at this point, students are starting to look at the materials and get really excited.



Suzanne Penna 58:47

Yeah.



Leslie Gaynor 58:48

Maybe even hooked on certain sites.



Suzanne Penna 58:50

Absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 58:50

Can you be as excited as you really are?

Suzanne Penna 58:54

I mean, yes, you can be excited. I will say excited, but professional. You know, mania is not a good look for anyone. [laughs] But yeah, if you're really interested in the site, convey it. You know, like, this site perfectly matches what I'm looking for.



I'm looking for X, Y, and Z. As you can see from my CV - and you're highlighting your A, B, and C that makes you so excited about this - this is a perfect fit for what I'm looking for. You should talk about your end goal in your cover letter. Like, do you want to be in an academic medical center? Do you want to be in a VA? Do you want to be in a community mental health center? If that is your goal, you should put it in there and how this internship will help you reach your goal.

Leslie Gaynor 59:35



So that's a really good outline for your cover letter. This is me, this is where I have strengths and growth areas, and this is how your site would really highlight those strengths and help me grow.



Suzanne Penna 59:46

Yeah. And be excited. That's fine.



Leslie Gaynor 59:49

Good.



Suzanne Penna 59:50

Yes.



Leslie Gaynor 59:51

Internships might also ask students to include one to two work samples with their internship application. If neuropsych is a major area of study, the student may be asked to provide one to two de-identified neuropsych reports. The students may also be asked to provide therapy case conceptualization. So in terms of that neuropsychology report, what is an appropriate case and report for a work sample?



Suzanne Penna 1:00:15

I think there are a couple of factors. One is if there is a case that matches the patient population of the internship site that you're looking for. So if you're applying to, let's say, a department of neurology that's heavy in epilepsy and you've seen an epilepsy case, that might be helpful. Or if you are applying to a lifespan position but maybe you don't have as much peds experience as you want, think about submitting a peds report to show that you've done this and you can see this. Make sure it's de-identified. Again, different sites may look at this differently. I always take these with a big grain of salt. Because the issue with reports like this is you don't know how much the student has written versus how much their supervisor has written.



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:04

That's true.



Suzanne Penna 1:01:04

And that's actually one of the reasons why, at least at our site, we don't ask for those. Because I have no idea what the student wrote versus what their supervisor wrote. They could have gone through 15 drafts for all I know.



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:15

Yeah, that's true.



Suzanne Penna 1:01:16

That's why the essays are so important.



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:19

And in this case, you're picking a clean case, with a diagnosis you can support, perhaps tailoring it to the site.



Suzanne Penna 1:01:26

Yeah, absolutely. You probably don't want to pick somebody who's blatantly malingering. I mean, you know, or something that's just really, really messy. Or something that is really weird or that you don't know that much about. And then they'll be like, "Oh, tell me all about your patient with Balint's!" and you're like "Uhhhhh..."



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:44

[laughs]



Suzanne Penna 1:01:45

Yeah, so be able to talk intelligently about the case that you're doing.



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:51

So stepping back to the big picture...



Suzanne Penna 1:01:53

Big picture.



Leslie Gaynor 1:01:54

What do you feel is the most important part of an internship application? I know that's a hard question because you already said it varies a lot. Do you think there's a consistent important part?



Suzanne Penna 1:02:05

I think well-roundedness is. I think that that's probably - I mean, I hate to say the whole package but it is. The well-roundedness of an applicant and the fit for a particular site. So let's say you're looking for an internship with neuropsychology as a major area of study, I want to know: Do you have the coursework? And if you don't have the coursework, did you try to find it somewhere? Because a lot of places don't have a neuropsych track, but there's still people who are like, "Well, how do I find this?" Did you do some of those NAN online courses? Like the neuroanatomy course. Did you seek out experiences, even if they weren't available for you.



Leslie Gaynor 1:02:45

Right.



Suzanne Penna 1:02:45

Students that hustle get a lot of respect in my book. I've had people say, "My program doesn't do this, but this is something I want to do. So I went out and created a practicum." Awesome, awesome. You get bonus points for that. Like, that's fantastic because it shows me that you're really trying to get that relevant experience. You know, do they have practica in multiple types of settings? And again, this is not just assessment practicum. Do they have therapy practicum in a lot of different settings? Do they have strong letters? You know, for me, coming from an academic medical center, do they have a reasonable research history? Can they think like a scientist? So it really is the whole shebang.



Leslie Gaynor 1:03:26

And it gives you an opportunity for each student at different sites, with unique available opportunities, to still shine.



Suzanne Penna 1:03:33

Absolutely.



Leslie Gaynor 1:03:34

Because it's not about what's offered and it's not all about the history of your program.



Suzanne Penna 1:03:40

No, and it's perfectly okay to say, "Well, you know, I'm really interested in a clinical career. So that's been the focus of my graduate work. So, necessarily, my research is less." Fine. Make a case for it. That's totally fine. Again, show me who you are through these types of things. So, in those three areas some people are going to be stronger than others just based on availability, we get that.



Leslie Gaynor 1:04:03

So of course it is important to mention that internship interviews will be a little different this year.



Suzanne Penna 1:04:08

They will be.

Leslie Gaynor 1:04:08



Like you said. On June 18, APPIC released an APPIC Recruitment and Selective Guidance, strongly encouraging "all doctoral internship and postdoctoral residency/fellowship programs to exclusively use virtual, remote, or on-line open houses, interviews, and/or tours for the entire selection process" rather than in-person recruitment formats. You said earlier that you feel really good about interviews going virtual. In what way do you think it will be advantageous for students and sites? And in what way do you think it'll make the process more difficult?

Suzanne Penna 1:04:41



I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, quite frankly. Clearly, I have a bias. I've probably made that very clear. I think that you can still get a feel for a place without having to see a place. It's interesting because for fellowship, the interview process is typically much shorter and you never see where you're going to be for two years. So I do find it ironic that, you know, we want people here for an entire day.

Leslie Gaynor 1:05:04



Yeah. That's true.

Suzanne Penna 1:05:06



But I feel like it is incredibly advantageous from a financial point of view - you know, you're not traveling all over the place, you're not putting your entire life on hold, and you're still meeting the people you're going to meet. You can still find out this information that you're looking for. I mean, the disadvantage is you do get a sense of a place from being at a place. But you can get excellent training in a trailer, just saying, as we sit in a trailer doing this. I think you get a vibe of a place no matter what, by talking to the people. I think the most important people to talk to when you interview, you know, aside from your major rotation faculty are the current interns.

Leslie Gaynor 1:05:47



Yeah, I would agree.

Suzanne Penna 1:05:49



And they are going to give you a sense of a place more than just about anything else.



Leslie Gaynor 1:05:53

And do you think that's something that's going to be offered with interviews? Or is that something that internship applicants should seek out outside of the virtual interview day?



Suzanne Penna 1:06:02

Let's just put it this way, if it's not offered, I would seek it out. I would be uncomfortable with any site that would not let you talk to their current interns. I mean, that's kind of the whole point. I think by the time you get to the interview stage, being selected for an interview means that you would already be successful at the site. The interview is more of - Are you a good fit? Are you a good match for what the site has to offer? So really using the interview to figure out is this place good for me? And they're thinking the same thing. Is this person a good fit for what we have to offer? So it really is a matter of fit, you're already going to be successful there just by nature of getting an interview. So I feel like you can still do that in a Zoom interview.



Leslie Gaynor 1:06:45

And it seems like it's about the people you talk to and the questions you ask. What kind of questions do you think would help someone get the feel of a site?



Suzanne Penna 1:06:56

Like, you know: Tell me what a typical week is like. Tell me about the patient populations that you see. What attributes make interns successful here? Who does well in this kind of environment? Who doesn't? Again, getting a sense from interns, the current year and then maybe even the year before - that you'd have to probably do your own research on. But I definitely remember cutting out internship sites just based on the interns. I remember asking, "What do you do on weekends?" And she went, "Weekends?" I was like, "Oh, yeah, no, I can't do this." I think most internship sites are going to be honest with you. Because if you're coming here, they want you to be happy here. So people aren't gonna lie to you - if you're working a 60 hour week and they tell you it's a 40 hour week, that's not in their best interests.



Leslie Gaynor 1:07:49

True.



Suzanne Penna 1:07:50

I don't know about the virtual tours. Those are going to be interesting. Quite frankly, we haven't worked that out yet. But the Zoom stuff? I feel like everyone's comfortable with that now.



Leslie Gaynor 1:07:58

The virtual tours are going to be a little shaky.



Suzanne Penna 1:08:00

They're going to be a little shaky. It's going to be kind of "Blair Witch Project". But I'm sure we can make it happen.



Leslie Gaynor 1:08:06

Yeah. That's another thing where if you have older students in your program who have already interviewed, ask them, "What did these hallways look like? What does my office look like if I were to go there?"



Suzanne Penna 1:08:16

Yeah. Do you have an office or what is the space like for interns? Absolutely. And hopefully by the time internship next year rolls around, we will not all be doing Zoom telehealth or teleneuropsychology from our homes.



Leslie Gaynor 1:08:30

Right.



Suzanne Penna 1:08:31

One can hope.



Leslie Gaynor 1:08:32

One can hope. [laughs] So how can students shine during video interviews? And are there do's and don'ts for interviewing digitally?



Suzanne Penna 1:08:41

Oh, gosh. I mean you shine in a digital interview the same way you shine in an in-person interview. Be engaged, answer questions, ask questions, be prepared about the site. So I think that's easy. In general try to not have background noise, be in a quiet place - you know, if you have kids, try to keep them out of the room. I

think "be professional" works in all aspects of things. I would say, you know, just on an off chance that you have to stand up and walk out of the room make sure you don't have pajama bottoms on and a suit on top - like, put the whole suit on. I would just say from a psychological point of view, you do feel more professional when you're dressed more professionally. So I would do that. Like, you know, don't interview in your nightgown.



Leslie Gaynor 1:09:29

Yeah. Sometimes I put on shoes and it helps me.



Suzanne Penna 1:09:32

Right. Put on the shoes! Do the whole thing! You know, it's that state-dependent learning. If you've got that professional vibe going it makes you more professional.



Leslie Gaynor 1:09:41

Yeah.



Suzanne Penna 1:09:42

And in general, on Zoom, I know for me, I don't like watching myself interview so I always hide my face when I interview. Again, you may decide that you would rather see what you're looking like as you talk, that's fine, but know beforehand. I think the good news is by the time internship interviews roll around, everyone's going to have a whole lot of experience with Zoom.



Leslie Gaynor 1:10:03

That's true. You're practicing all the time right now.



Suzanne Penna 1:10:07

Right. So the learning curve is going to be there. One of the things I also think that's great about all online interviews is, in the past some people would offer Zoom interviews or phone interviews versus in-person and there was this idea that if you didn't cough up the bucks to come in person that meant that you really weren't interested in the site. And I hated that. Because again, that just seemed to marginalize people financially. So I am glad that this is leveling the playing field for a lot of people. And, quite frankly, I hope we stay with this. I mean, I'm going to push for Emory to, regardless. But I would hope that the entire field takes this and runs with it. At most, what they're spending is 20 bucks on lunch with you. And you spent \$400 on a plane flight, and God knows how much either renting a car,

crashing on somebody's floor that might have been an elementary school friend, or coughing up even more money for a hotel room. I mean, it's just - I think it's irresponsible.

Leslie Gaynor 1:11:06



So although APPIC maintains that doctoral and internship programs should “ensure that applicants have acquired the necessary competencies in order to be ready to progress to the next phase of their training”, the document also acknowledged that sites should “be creative and innovative with their evaluation strategies of applicants to their programs”. Specifically, they suggested that sites should “consider exceptions to their minimum hour and direct service hour requirements”. Is this guidance being adopted by most internship sites?

Suzanne Penna 1:11:35



I would say so. I mean, particularly in times of COVID. Yeah. I mean, people's training has necessarily been disrupted. I think that all bets are off. But you still want to make sure that somebody can at least survive on your internship. I mean, if your expectation for somebody is they're writing two neuropsych assessments a week, and they only have completed, say, 14 reports, that's not going to work. So yes, I think that anytime you have minimum cut offs, that's a bad idea. But you should still have a breadth and depth of experience so that you're not going to completely drown on internship.

Leslie Gaynor 1:12:15



But you don't think that for students who might have missed part of a semester's worth of neuropsych training, that it will affect their hours in a way that sites are going to look down upon? Sounds like the average overall is going to be lowered this year.

Suzanne Penna 1:12:28



That's fine. That's not going to hurt anybody. Everybody knows that this has been an odd year.

Leslie Gaynor 1:12:34



It's good to remember that it's been odd for all of us.



Suzanne Penna 1:12:36

Everybody. Yeah. I mean, our outpatient clinic was shut down for four weeks when we were trying to figure out how to convert this to teleneuropsychology.



Leslie Gaynor 1:12:46

Right.



Suzanne Penna 1:12:47

So yeah, this year is definitely going to be a funky, all bets are off year. On the plus side, I feel that everybody is sort of rolling with it because we have to.



Leslie Gaynor 1:12:55

So as I mentioned before, Dr. Penna is the secretary and treasurer for the Association for Internship Training in Clinical Neuropsychology or AITCN. I thought it would be helpful for our listeners if you told us what AITCN's mission is, and what the organization does in terms of internship training.



Suzanne Penna 1:13:13

So really, what we're doing is helping people comb through the APPIC site. You know, where are the clinical neuropsychology training programs that have major areas of studies in neuropsychology and listing them on our site and looking to see that they are meeting those criteria. That's what we're here to do. But we work with a lot of different organizations - we work with ANST, we work with the Clinical Neuropsychology Synarchy - to really make sure that training is available and people know that they're out there. I think the biggest thing is helping students weed through all of these programs.



Leslie Gaynor 1:13:52

So it sounds like you do have some resources for students to help them prepare for internship.



Suzanne Penna 1:13:56

Yes. So that's all on our website. I think our website is probably the most helpful thing we've got going for us. So I would say to peruse the website, and if you have questions, contact any of us on the board.



Leslie Gaynor 1:14:09

And there's a list of board members on the web.



Suzanne Penna 1:14:11

Yes, there is. It's also on the website.



Leslie Gaynor 1:14:15

So before I let you go, I have two bonus questions for you.



Suzanne Penna 1:14:18

Ohh, bonus questions! Okay.



Leslie Gaynor 1:14:20

These are about neuropsychology broadly and not specific to internship applications. We ask them to all of our guests.



Suzanne Penna 1:14:25

Oh, awesome.



Leslie Gaynor 1:14:27

If you could improve one thing about the field of neuropsychology, what would it be?



Suzanne Penna 1:14:31

I would consolidate training. I have wanted for years to adopt a residency model. If we are going to compete and have parity with medical doctors, we need to adopt a medical residency model. So I think that the internship and fellowship years, particularly because all neuropsychologists will ultimately be board certified in my ideal world, should be a three year process - which includes the internship year and then you go right into your two year fellowship. So instead of picking up moving across the country for one year, and then moving back across the country for a two year fellowship, it's all in one spot. That would be my dream for neuropsychology.



Leslie Gaynor 1:15:13

Is that something that people are talking about? Is that something being considered?



Suzanne Penna 1:15:18

It's my personal little soapbox for APPCN, that I'm a part of. I think the problem, unfortunately, is logistics and finances. Not every place that has a neuropsych

internship has a fellowship or can afford a fellowship. You know, sometimes fellowships are much more financially dependent or grant dependent than internships are. So it's not always feasible to do that. But I would love to have a more formalized match. You know, if you know you're going to be a neuropsychologist, just knock out all that training in one go.



Leslie Gaynor 1:15:52

Well, great.



Suzanne Penna 1:15:54

I know it's a little out there.



Leslie Gaynor 1:15:56

No, but it's great. And it's great to have different ideas. I think you're the first one who's brought that up.



Suzanne Penna 1:16:01

I have been poo-pooed out of more than one meeting about this. But I think, again, financially and educationally speaking it just makes sense.



Leslie Gaynor 1:16:10

Yeah, I can see the logic in that. So what is one bit of advice you wish someone told you when you were training, or that someone did tell you that really made a difference? We're looking for an actionable step that trainees can take, that they may not have thought of, that could improve their training and performance.



Suzanne Penna 1:16:28

Well, I can tell you one that they've probably thought of, but that's still the best advice I have: Find a mentor. That's it. Find a mentor. Even if your mentor is not in your program, even if your mentor is not your advisor. That was it. I found a mentor, who was not my advisor. You know, I started graduate school as a clinical neuropsychologist looking at biomarkers in depression and I ended up as a clinical neuropsychologist looking at traumatic brain injury. So I really segued, and I found a mentor, and she made all the difference. Particularly if you are a woman or person of color, I would say even more so, find a mentor. It's really important.



Leslie Gaynor 1:17:10

It seems like the mentorship relationship does really last.



Suzanne Penna 1:17:16

It does.



Leslie Gaynor 1:17:16

For the entirety of your career.



Suzanne Penna 1:17:17

Yeah, I love my students. They're like my extended family. INS will probably be virtual this year. But, God, I hope it's not because it is my favorite time of year because I get to see all of these trainees that I've taught in the past and worked with in the past. I like watching them grow and thrive, it's the most satisfying aspect of my entire career. I love it. So for you to find a mentor that is in your corner, and that you can be honest with - like, "You know what, I have to be here", or "I'm only doing this because this is what got me into grad school. But here's really where my interests lie". Like, you want to be able to lay it on the table. You want to use this person to say, "Okay, what is it that I like about them that I want to emulate? And what is it that I don't like about them that I want to avoid?"



Leslie Gaynor 1:18:06

True.



Suzanne Penna 1:18:06

Yeah, I mean, you can be a mentor in more than one way. You can be a mentor of what not to do, such as Dr. Penna and her last minute getting all my hours together. Or as a mentor of what to do. So, you know, it works both ways.



Leslie Gaynor 1:18:19

That's true. Well, excellent. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast.



Suzanne Penna 1:18:24

You're so welcome. I enjoyed it. Hopefully I was of some value to people.



Leslie Gaynor 1:18:28

Oh, definitely.



Transition Music 1:18:29

John Bellone 1:18:33



Wow. Well, that was a fantastic discussion with so much information that graduate students at all levels will benefit from, particularly those actively in the process of applying for internship. A big thanks to Dr. Penna for sharing her thoughts and a huge thanks to Leslie Gaynor. This episode was Leslie's brainchild. She did an incredible job planning it out and was such a good interviewer. We're going to have to get her on the show more often. Leslie wanted me to thank Lise De Wit and Jessica Zuchowski (sp?) for helping her prepare for this interview. I also want to mention that we have lots of internship-related resources and links available in our show notes, which you can find at navneuro.com/53. Ryan and I also did a full episode on interviewing for internship and fellowship, which was episode 8, in case you're interested. Well, that's all for today. Thanks so much for listening, and join us next time as we continue to navigate the brain and behavior.



Exit Music 1:19:30

John Bellone 1:19:54



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Ryan Van Patten 1:20:05



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