

## Specialist Internship Guidelines

School Psychology Specialist Program  
Department of Educational & School Psychology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

## **Internship Description & Intent**

The internship, EDSP 952, is a field-based experience completed on a full-time basis by the student in the third year of the specialist program. It is the culminating experience of the specialist program in school psychology. Requirements of the internship are dictated by the National Association of School Psychologists and are not subject to modification based on student convenience or prior experience.

The internship is a two-semester (full academic year) on-site experience. Usually all of this time will be spent in a school setting. On occasion, an internship will be across two settings, only one of which is actually in the schools. That is permissible as long as all of the intern's experiences are related to school-based issues. During this field placement the student functions under the direct supervision of a certified school psychologist at the internship site. The student practices in a carefully supervised, but relatively independent manner, and progressively assumes the role and function of a psychologist in the schools. IUP faculty supervision is also provided through site visits and periodic meetings between the intern and the faculty supervisor on campus.

The specialist internship encompasses the IUP academic year, which is defined as the period from the beginning of the fall term to the end of the spring term, as defined by the Friday before graduation. In no circumstances may the internship be less than 1200 hours. If a student negotiates an internship agreement with their internship site that goes beyond the IUP academic year (e.g., after spring graduation until the end of the school district's school year), the termination date of the internship will be the date that the student negotiates. Students in the doctoral program should be aware of the beginning of summer term before entering into such agreements.

You are devoting a year of your life to the internship experience. You are paying tuition for the year (3 credits each semester that are not paid for even if you have had an assistantship). And, if you leave the area, you will have the cost and energy expended in moving. So, even though you are busy, take the time to think carefully about your internship and explore your options thoroughly. A quality internship experience is an investment in your professional development that will pay you back for years to come.

## **Location Policy**

It is the responsibility of the intern to locate an internship site that meets the requirements of the specialist program. Interns may be placed in urban, rural, or suburban settings. However, exposure of the intern to children and families of diverse backgrounds, strengths, and needs is paramount. Because sites will be visited by faculty supervisors, locations must be within an **8 hour** drive from IUP. In the event that personal or professional needs suggest an exception to this policy, the student must obtain permission from the School Psychology faculty committee for placement further away. The committee reserves the right to make decisions regarding the intern's distance placement on a case-by-case basis. There are special requirements for securing a distance internship placement. See the appendix for a copy of the distance internship application form.

## **Site Requirements**

The most important characteristic of an internship site, in addition to quality supervision, which will be discussed below, is the variety of experience that is offered. All sites must provide experience with students from at least grades K-12, and preschool experience is also desirable. Sites must offer contact with children who have a variety of disabilities and those who are gifted; and they must offer opportunities to work with children outside of special education. In addition to the type of student served, variety must be available with regard to the role of the school psychologist and the intern. The best way to assess whether or not the role diversity is appropriate is to think about what you have been trained to do and to see whether those services are actually provided by the school psychologists in the setting you are considering. Role diversity should

include consultation, counseling, provision of in-service, crisis intervention, and involvement in system related services, in addition to assessment and formulation of recommendations. See the appendix for a copy of the internship requirements.

### **Supervisor Requirements**

Quality of supervision is the characteristic of your internship that will have the most influence on your professional development. As you evaluate a site, you should place special emphasis on the type of supervision you will receive, who will provide it, and whether you feel that you would be compatible with that individual. There are some supervisor requirements that must be met for a site to be approved:

- Supervisors must be certified school psychologists at the specialist level or higher in the states where employed.
- Supervisors must be employed full time by the school district in which the student is interning.
- Supervisors must have worked in the district at least one full year prior to taking on an intern
- Supervisors must have been certified and practiced as a school psychologist at least 3 years before taking on an intern.
- No more than 2 supervisors are permitted for any one intern during the internship period.
- Supervisors must provide at least two hours of supervision to the intern per week.

In addition to these requirements, there are some other factors you should consider. You should ask questions about the role your supervisor plays in the district. A supervisor who is also a director of special education in a large district may have limited time to devote to supervision, in spite of the best intentions. You should ask about a typical day for your supervisor. This will give you an idea of what a day might be like for you after you have been in the district for a while. It will also tell you about the role diversity of school psychologists in the district. Again, in spite of the best of intentions, a supervisor who has a limited role as a school psychologist is not likely to be able to provide varied experience and adequate supervision in all of the areas to which interns should be exposed.

### **Academic Requirements**

It is imperative to note that no student will be permitted to begin their internship prior to the successful completion of the comprehensive examination. If a student has failed the comprehensive examination, it needs to be retaken and passed before starting internship. In addition, all Pass with Reservations must be remediated before starting internship.

### **Attaining an Internship**

#### **Phase I: Self Study: Who are you and what do you want?**

As you probably know by now, at the specialist level, the school psychologist is trained as a generalist, *i.e.*, the student is exposed to a variety of roles and functions. The effective internship will continue to provide you with learning and experience in this diverse role. However, school districts can be as different from one another as the communities of which they are a part. Also, you will make professional contacts in the area of your internship that may increase your chances of eventually getting a job in that geographical area.

So, it is a good idea to begin your internship search by asking yourself some **personal questions**:

1. Would you prefer to work close to your original home or to locate in an area that is less familiar?
2. Can you afford to live on your own, perhaps without a roommate, if you leave the area?

3. Are you more comfortable in a rural area? Suburban? Urban? (If you would like to try something different, perhaps now is the time.)
4. Would you enjoy working with ethnically diverse populations and perhaps use your skills with a second language or learn one?
5. Will your car survive long trips back and forth to campus if you decide to intern longer than eight hours away?
6. Do personal responsibilities tie you to this local area?
7. Would you prefer an internship site where many IUP interns have gone before or would you like a place where no one else has been?

There are also many **professional development issues** to consider:

1. Will you learn more if you are one of several interns that form a cohort group at the site or would you benefit most by being the only intern?
2. Does it matter to you if your supervisor is male or female, younger or older, has been with the district a long time or just a few years?
3. Would you learn more in a large district with many psychologists or benefit from working with only a small group in a smaller district?

### **Phase II: What's out there?**

Once you have narrowed your interests a bit, you are ready to look into some available sites. Most school districts have Web sites. While those sites may not directly address school psychology internships, they will tell you about the district and also who to contact with questions. Our internship box is another place to check. It consists of forms completed by prior interns and includes their impressions of the site. Be sure to check the dates when an IUP intern was last placed at the site, to see how recent the information is. Also note that, just because a site is in the box does not mean that it is approved. Each internship arrangement must be cleared with the Internship Coordinator each time it is used. Feel free to contact prior interns and get their suggestions and ideas. Internships are also posted on our bulletin board and our department Web page. Now that interns are so much in demand, you will also find internships advertised in the Communiqué, so be sure your NASP membership is up to date.

It is also a good idea to call the special services department of any school district in which you are interested. Some districts just depend on word of mouth to get interns and you will not hear anything about the site unless you take the initiative to call. Some districts may decide to take an intern, even if they have not before, if you give them the idea.

### **Phase III: Putting your best foot forward**

This phase is actually one that you should have been working on all along, but real life being what it is, you may not have done all that you could. Now is the time.

- Organize all of that good work you have done in the last two years into a portfolio that illustrates the relevant skills you have mastered.
  - One easy way to do this is to review your work by course, since each course really represents a different facet of school psychology practice.
  - Include representations of your best work neatly grouped by area. This is best done by training standard, with work representing each NASP standard placed in that location.
  - Assistance for developing electronic portfolios, and a format arranged by standard, is available through the College of Education by speaking with Lloyd Onyett.
- Review different resume models and develop a resume that emphasizes your training and experience in school psychology and with children, in general. Many different models can be effective. Remember to keep it brief and to emphasize what is relevant to the internship.

- Choose three (3) individuals to write letters of recommendation.
  - Ideally, one letter should be from someone who can attest to your work outside of the classroom. The field supervisor on your practicum, the principal at the school where you have had some experience, or someone from an agency where you have volunteered, might be good possibilities.
  - At least one letter should be from a faculty member here at IUP.

#### **Phase IV: Methods of Inquiry**

If you just want to know if a site is planning to take interns, a call, Web site visit, or email may suffice. Be sure to contact a person who really knows. For school psychology interns, that person is unlikely to be in the personnel office. Usually, you will have to make a contact with the supervisor of school psychologists or with the school psychologist, if there is only one. Making a direct contact is a good idea because if they have not entertained the possibility of taking an intern, they may after talking with you. You are permitted to make long distance calls regarding internships from the department phone designated for this purpose. You must document your call.

If your preliminary contact has resulted in an invitation to apply, you should skip the inquiry letter and go right to the application packet. It is inconvenient, however, to send application packets to a long list of sites, some of which may not be taking interns that year, so do your preliminary contacts first.

Even in this age of electronics, a formal letter is still the preferred method of inquiry and application for jobs and internships. The utmost care should be taken to ensure that this letter is well written, grammatically correct, and totally free of spelling errors (spell checker is not sufficient!). Send your letter to a specific individual whose address you have double-checked. It is useless to send a letter to “Director, School Psychology Services” (they may not have one), or to “Director of Personnel.” These kinds of letters rarely find their way the person with whom you really want to communicate. Take the time to find out where your letter should be sent and to whom.

Begin your letter with the reason for your contact and a brief description of the program and your progress to date. Explain, again briefly, what you are looking for in an internship. There is no need to be very specific at this point because, if you decide that you are interested in a particular site, the program coordinator will send the internship requirements to the site, so that they will be fully aware of them. Finally, you should highlight a few of your qualifications that you would like them to know about early on. Do not talk about personal characteristics like being motivated, liking children, or being hard-working. Instead, focus on something that makes you unique among internship applicants. One thing all of you have, for example, is experience in a clinic setting and in the schools (Practicum II). If you have a master’s degree in another area, mention it. If you were a Teaching Associate, mention that. If you have received a graduate merit award, have a research interest that you have presented on or written about, or have had an uncommon assistantship position, say so.

After a week or two, if you have not received a response, follow-up with a phone call.

If you get a positive response, and are still interested, you are ready to send an application packet. Find out what the district would like you to send. Sometimes they have forms they would like you to complete and include with your application packet. Sometimes you will just have to make your own decision about what to include. Usually, you should send at least the following:

1. Your resume
2. Another cover letter
3. Three letters of recommendation

Be sure to find out exactly to whom the packet should be addressed. For faculty letters of recommendation, ask the professor if you might have the letter on plain paper addressed, "Dear Colleague." That allows you to copy the letter on department letterhead each time you apply to a new site. Take only the number of letterhead pages that you will need for your internship applications, please.

## **Phase V: Application**

### **Your Resume**

There are many different acceptable formats for a resume. You might contact the University placement office for ideas, if you would like more help. The department Internship Coordinator would be happy to review your letters and your resume and to help you with planning both. Here are a few things to keep in mind. For identifying information, include your full name, address, and phone numbers separated with regard to day and evening, or home and school/work. Include an email only if you check it regularly and if it does not sound silly (Bubbles, Cutie, or Sexyone, for example, will not set the right tone!). There is no need to include your age or marital status. With regard to education, list your most recent degree first. For most of you, that will be your M.Ed. List each degree separately, and include what the degree was in (your M.Ed., for example is in Educational Psychology), and include the college or university from which it was received. If you have been accepted into the doctoral program, say something like, IUP School Psychology Doctoral Program acceptance (the date of acceptance). Do not include the high school attended; just go back as far as undergraduate school. List your job experience with your most current job first. If you have jobs that are not related to the field but you spent several years doing them, list them (for example, if you had a prior profession and are retooling). However, if they were filler or part time jobs, leave them out, or put them at the end under a classification of part time, or something of that nature.

List volunteer positions separately, but do not neglect to include them. They tell a lot about your commitment to children and your willingness to contribute and learn. Your assistantship at IUP is best listed as employment, since that gives you a chance to explain what you did on your assistantship (and do describe what you did). You should list it as an assistantship, with the Department of Educational & School Psychology at IUP as your employer (unless, of course, you were assigned to another department for your assistantship). You should also list your assistantship under awards and honors, but do not describe it again. Be sure to include a section on professional development where you can list conferences attended, presentations made, articles written, and involvement in SPAN. Membership in professional organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists and the Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania is very important and should be listed separately as Membership in Professional Associations.

### **The Interview**

The interview process is so variable that it really is not possible to give any guidelines with regard to expectations. Interviews have been a ½ hour where the applicant is mostly just given the opportunity to ask questions, and interviews have lasted several hours where applicants have met with different groups of personnel and have been given scenarios and asked how they would address them. If other IUP interns have been at the site, ask them how they were interviewed. However, this is not always fool proof because processes change. It is always a good idea to ask the district what you might expect, in general, with regard to the interview process, for example, how long might it be and who will be attending. This should help you plan, at least a little.

Following your interview, you should send a note or email of thanks to your primary contact.

Phase VI: Decision Making

## Words to the Wise

IUP faculty and student experience has led to some knowledge of what to avoid, or at least some "red flags," that should be carefully evaluated. Think twice if:

- Your interview focuses mainly on what tests you have been taught to give.
- You are not able to meet the individual who will be your supervisor.
- The district has been unable to fill school psychologist positions over a relatively long period of time.
- The district has been cited for compliance issues.
- School personnel show no interest in seeing the list of experiences you are required to have.
- Administrators seem to have the impression that you will learn so much at their schools that you should not even consider the possibility of being paid.
- The stipend is so high that it is clear you are really being hired as an employee, not a learner.

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Most school districts provide a stipend for school psychology interns. This is a factor that changes with the need for interns and school psychologists, in general. Right now, stipends are on the rise, even in western Pennsylvania where they have traditionally been low. In the last three years the mean internship stipend for IUP interns has been approximately \$13,000. In the last five years stipends have ranged from 0 to \$30,000. However, rarely will you be paid anything close to what is made by a professional employee. Provision of benefits such as health care or sick leave is also rare, so you should be sure to provide your own health insurance. *You should also have your own professional liability insurance.*

Assistantships are not possible during your internship year. While you will be registering for only 3 graduate credits per semester, you will still have full time student status. Therefore, application for student loans is an option during your internship year. Working at a part time job during your internship is strongly discouraged, since it is very likely to detract from your ability to give the internship the attention it deserves. *Your IUP activity fee can be waived if you are a sufficient distance from main campus.*

Students should keep in mind that the amount of the internship stipend is not at all related to the quality of the experience. Some of the best sites may not provide the highest stipends. However, sites are expected, based on guidelines set down by the National Association of School Psychologists, to provide some stipend for interns. IUP interns almost always get some stipend unless, for personal reasons, they are limited in the geographical area in which they can apply. A whole year is a long time to work for no stipend at all.

## Phase VII: Professional Courtesy: Graciously Declining

When you have signed a contract, you must notify other districts to which you have applied that you are no longer available. This should be done in writing as soon as the contract is signed. Each contact you make with a district contributes or detracts from your reputation and word does spread. Do not permit a district to waste time and money considering your application when you already know you will be going somewhere else.

The internship seeking process does not end with your contract. It ends with notification of all districts to which you have applied that you are withdrawing your application. It is not necessary to explain why you have chosen another site or even to name the site. A brief notification that you have taken another internship is sufficient.

## Most Frequent Questions

### **How many sites should I apply to?**

A general rule of thumb is to apply to **five** sites. (You may not interview at all of them.) However, the number depends a bit on how familiar you are with the sites you are considering. If you are applying to sites out of state where IUP interns have not been before, in an area with which you are unfamiliar, you may want to apply to more. If you are applying to a site with which you have had substantial prior and positive contact, you know they will be taking an intern, and they have had IUP interns before, you may apply to fewer. However, do not fall into the trap of believing that you will have an internship because you are liked, have been invited to apply, or even have had a verbal offer. Budgets change at the last minute and things change from year to year. **Until you have a signed contract, you do not have an internship.**

### **Should I continue to interview, after I have had an offer?**

Interviewing costs money. This is a matter of personal preference and judgment. Remember, however, that rarely will the person who made you the offer be the person who signs the contract. They may not know of the most recent budget problems or issues facing the school board. **Until you have a signed contract, you do not have an internship.**

### **When should I begin this process?**

You should start thinking about where you would like to apply now. See the suggested timeline on the last page of this booklet.

### **Should I have the Internship Coordinator send internship requirements to all of the sites in which I am interested?**

No. Do some exploration first. If you are interested in a site and plan to apply, give the coordinator the names and addresses of just those sites. The site should have the internship requirements before your interview, though, so they know what they will be expected to provide.

### **For how many days will the contract be written?**

Your contract is for the *academic year* at the district in question. You begin when the school psychologists there begin, BUT you end the Friday before the spring graduation at IUP. You may count the number of working days from the start date for the school psychologists in the district for that school year to the Friday before the day of graduation at IUP, and use that number of days for your contract. Or, you may say “academic year” and stipulate a start and stop date. You should have the same holidays as the full time school psychologists in your district. On occasion, sites will ask you to work the whole school year, either as a requirement of employment or as a favor to them. You may do so, if you wish. *However, if you are in the doctoral program at IUP, remember that you must be available to attend summer session I which, at this writing, begins the first week in June.* If a district will not allow you to end your commitment at a time that is in keeping with your needs, you should consider another district. In any event, be sure that the length of contract issue is ironed out early on in the process. Interns may not leave internships early in order to take a permanent position, even in the district in which they are interning.

### **What do I do if I have had an offer, but it is not from my first choice?**

Because this is a matter of personal judgment, it is difficult to give an answer that will fit all situations. Sometimes, however, students feel a need to give an immediate response to a district’s offer when such a quick response is really not required. If more time is needed to make a considered decision, ask for more time. If the district refuses to give more time, one might call the first choice site and let them know of the

situation. If the first choice site is not ready to make a decision and the offering site will not wait, then the student will have to choose. However, in most of these situations, sites are usually willing to be flexible and in a few days things work themselves out.

### **Most Common Mistakes of the Internship Seeker**

Some of these errors are minor and have not caused any major problems. They are more of a nuisance than anything else. Others are a little more significant. In any event, with a little forethought they can be avoided altogether.

- Failure to include specifics in the resume that could really make your application stand out. Listing an assistantship on which you did educational program evaluation or research, for example, simply as “assistantship.”
- “Shotgunning” letters of inquiry, just sending out a lot of letters without careful consideration of whether the district takes interns and who the letter should go to
- Calling personnel departments and not getting accurate information, when calling the office of the school psychologists would have been more productive
- Failure to get accurate estimates of how long it might be before the district would be ready to sign a contract
- Getting busy during the school year and not taking adequate time to explore internships
- Putting convenience before site characteristics, such as not wanting to drive too far and, therefore, taking a less than quality site
- Putting finances before site characteristics and thereby getting more money but a less than quality experience
- Failing to consider the nature of the community where one will be living and not just the district, ending up in a rural area when one really wanted to be in the city, for example
- Failure to explore options thoroughly and staying only with geographical locations one knows or where one has contacts
- Settling on a site too early because of anxiety about the process, when more exploration might have resulted in a more quality site
- Depending only on the department internship box for ideas and not making independent explorations (this really does require thinking outside the box!)

### **Intern Seekers Timeline**

Fall Second Year	Do Self Study
Fall Second Year	Prepare Portfolio/Begin Resume
Mid Fall	Finalize Portfolio/Resume Draft Inquiry Letter
November	Make inquiry phone calls/Send emails/Check Web sites Send inquiry letters Contact past interns
December	Narrow application list Find out what is needed for applications

\*January

Send applications

February/March/April

Interviews

March/April/May

Accept positions and complete form for the office

April/May

Office sends contracts to districts for signature

\*Some internship sites will have earlier timelines (and some will be much later). Be sure to ask about application deadlines when you contact the site.