

Chronicles of a clinical psychology internship applicant - Part II: II: The interview and match process

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Unlike Part I of this series, which appeared in the Winter 2002 issue of *Psynopsis*, and was intended for clinical psychology graduate students at all levels of their program, this article is geared towards those students who will be going through the internship process in the near future. Following the application stage, the Interview process represents the second significant hurdle in securing an internship position. In my experience, there is a relatively short, if not non-existent, period of “down time” between the completion of applications and the scheduling of interviews. What follows is a summary of what I found to be some important aspects of the interview and match processes.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Communicating with sites

There are several important points to consider on the topic of communicating with sites. First, ensure that you regularly check your e-mail as this seems to be the method of choice for communication by a growing number of internship sites. If you have multiple e-mail addresses, ensure that you are checking the correct one. Some internship sites prefer to telephone their short-listed candidates in order to schedule interviews. As with email, ensure that you are checking your telephone messages on a very regular basis. If you are unable to access your messages, make arrangements with a

trusted person to do so for you. Another method of communication is traditional snail-mail. With the ease and efficiency of e-mail, however, this method of communication is becoming faded out. Your AAPI will contain both your home address as well as your university address; therefore, be sure to check both mailboxes for site information. You may even wish to alert your department's receptionist that you will be receiving important mail from prospective internship sites. The take-home message here is this: **Be sure that you are available, and if you are not, make arrangements with a trusted person to check your telephone messages, e-mail, and snail mail.**

Another caution to consider is that you will be hearing from most of your interview sites in December – a time when Canada Post is incredibly busy with holiday deliveries. If you have not heard from a site but your friend has, try to be patient for a few days. I had mentioned the APPIC list-serve, “intern network” in Part I of this series (register for it at www.appic.org), which is available to all intern candidates, current interns, and training directors. About mid-December this became a venue for communication among intern candidates to let each other know which sites they had heard from, and what was that method of communication. While the intern-network list-serve was very helpful in this regard, it also became a source of neurotic trepidation for some

candidates who had not heard from a site while others had. My advice is this: **Use this list-serve at your discretion – especially if you are highly anxiety-prone!**

Booking your interviews

Perhaps one of the most memorable aspects of the interview process is the significant dent made in your savings account! If your interviews involve air travel, APPIC makes pre-arranged travel deals with several of the major airline carriers. This information is made available on the APPIC website (www.appic.org) by early December, and although most of the discounts apply to air travel within the USA, there is usually one Canadian carrier included in the special. I found the web-based flight centers, such as travelocity.ca and expedia.ca, to have excellent last-minute specials. In some instances, your most affordable and reliable option will be Travelcuts, a student discount ticket agent. When booking your flights, be sure to verify if it is a direct flight or if it involves several stop-overs before your destination (Note that discount flights are less costly because they usually involve several connecting legs). If you are prepared for the lengthy delays incurred by plane changes and layovers, you can maximize your time by using it to (1) prepare for your interviews, (2) catch up on dissertation-related reading, or (3) take along a lap-top and work on dissertation or other academic activities. (I opted for the last choice and found that some of my most creative writing moments surfaced while sitting at the departure gate). Another important aspect to consider about flying in December and January is that this is a time with the highest likelihood of delays or cancellations due to poor weather conditions. Thus, it would be wise not to schedule your cross-country interviews one day after another. As I write this section, I am at an airport departure gate

waiting for a flight that was scheduled to leave 8 hours ago! Fortunately, I was able to schedule each of my interviews so that I arrive at my destination city the night before an interview. I would recommend doing the same so that if there are delays, it would still be possible to take an early morning flight on the day of the interview. The APPIC website also contains discount information on rental car agencies and hotels throughout Canada and the USA. Additionally, the internship site may have a list of nearby hotels with whom they have prearranged deals for student travellers.

Getting to your interviews – on time!

Be mentally prepared for delays, flight changes, or cancellations. If a flight delay overlaps into the time that you should be at your interview, telephone your interviewers directly. Another important point is this: **Carry all of your items with you – Do not check in your baggage!** No one will know (except you) if you have been wearing the same pants four days in a row! Pack very conservatively and keep contact information for the hotel and the interview in a convenient location in case of delays. Cellular phones come in handy here, especially if your delay involves sitting on the plane tarmac for several hours (this happened to a friend of mine– he called the training director from the tarmac and she gladly rescheduled his interview). Most major cities have good public transportation systems to and from the airport, and a significant amount of money can be saved traveling by bus instead of taxi. I found the internet quite useful in learning about each city's public transportation system, bus schedules, and fares. If you have some time the night before your interview, plan your route for the following day. You will be more relaxed if you arrive several hours early than if you rush in 15-20 minutes late!

If you take appropriate steps to minimize the intrusiveness of logistical details, you can save your resources for the one-on-one interactions at the interview.

Staying grounded during interviews

In the rush of traveling from a delayed flight to your series of interviews (which may be at different parts of a large hospital), it can be easy to neglect caring for yourself. Always carry snacks (e.g., dried fruit, chocolate, powerbars – depending on your preference) with you to soothe hunger pangs. While away from home you may still have sites trying to contact you. My advice here is: **Be accessible during your interviews! Try to remain connected to your home base while away from home.** This may require some creative planning on your part. Have a trusted friend or neighbour collect your snail-mail while you are out of town. I received some very important information from a site while I was interviewing at another site. Fortunately, I was able to retrieve this information, thus putting me in a situation where I could act appropriately and in enough time. Remember that the purpose of your travel is to have a successful interview. Enjoy this time. If you are gregarious you will have no difficulties introducing yourself to the various training staff, interns, and administrators you will meet. If you are more timid, this may be a good time to practice your assertiveness skills. Be confident, but not arrogant. If mental imagery helps achieve this goal, then go for it! Whatever you do, remember that quite often first impressions make lasting impressions. Think carefully before you share personal information. And most importantly, be polite! Take the time to meet with and thank the administrative staff who booked your interview. Ask for e-mails of the various individuals you meet so that you

can e-mail them a thank you note. As soon as possible following your interview, document your experience and take note of information that was not apparent in the brochure. I found writing a pro vs. con list to capture the features of each site very helpful as it helped jog my memory several weeks later when formulating my Rank- Order List. I wrote my thank you letters the same day of that interview, then saved and stored them to be sent away once all of my interviews were complete. The physical toll of flying, especially if your plans involve much east-west travel, can throw your system for a loop. Try to take care to ensure that you are getting the sleep you need, in addition to the nutrition and hydration you will need at this time more than ever.

The post-interview follow-up

Your thank-you notes should be sent shortly after your final interview. The note should highlight key aspects that may help the recipient to identify you, such as novel research projects or clinical training opportunities discussed. The consensus on intern-network this year was that e-mail thank you notes were appropriate, especially if the primary mode of communication between you and the site was via e-mail. Snail-mail thank you notes are also appropriate; however, a site may not receive your thank-you note in time before submitting their Rank-Order List. As a common courtesy, you should send thank-you notes to all sites interviewed, even if you are no longer interested in that site. One caveat to keep in mind, however, is that sharing rank-related information is in violation of the APPIC rules. You should avoid admitting to a site that they are your top-ranked choice, and instead use creative methods to indirectly express this such as, “My visit to the X internship reinforced my strong interest in your program” or “I

believe the opportunities your site offers matches very well with my goals for internship”.

THE MATCH PROCESS

Submitting your ranks

Applicants usually have 1-2 weeks after their final interview before their official Rank-Order List must be certified with the National Matching Services. During this time, you may want to consider the positive and negative aspects, both professionally and personally, of each internship site visited. There are several published articles (Stewart & Stewart, *Prof Psych Res Pract*, 1996,27,295-303; Stewart & Stewart, *Prof Psych Res Pract*, 1996,27, 521-6) that highlight important aspects to consider when formulating your list. In cases where the order of preference is not apparent, you may wish to use a mathematical computation to help in making your decision (Stewart & Stewart, 1996). Some factors to consider while formulating your list are: match with professional interests, opportunity for specialized training, quality/quantity of supervision, geography, reputation of the site, research opportunities, cost of living, and collegiality among staff, to name only a few. It is advisable to consult with your program's Director of Clinical Training before officially submitting your list. Once your ranking of sites is complete, you are ready to enter and certify this information at the National Matching Services website. I would recommend entering this information several days in advance of the due date in case you encounter computer difficulties. Another issue to keep in mind is time zones and the need to adjust your time to deadlines in Eastern Standard Time.

The “waiting game”

Once your Rank-Order List is certified with National Matching Services, there is usually a 2-week wait before Match Day. During this time, staff at National Matching Services work hard to ensure all information from applicants and sites is correct, and if there are errors (e.g., you enter a site code that does not exist) they will notify you ASAP! This may be the first time in several months where you are able to catch up on professional and personal neglected activities. I found sharing of experiences with other applicants over the intern-network list-serve to be very helpful in easing some of the anxiety leading up to Match Day and it served as a forum for support and reassurance among applicants during this uncertain time.

Match Day

Statistics reveal that Match Day goes very smoothly for most people, including those that have matched with an internship site through the Clearinghouse. After Match Day, the new intern will communicate with the site's Training Director directly. Additional questions about training opportunities may have been raised, and clarification on the intern's responsibilities is outlined in a contract. The final hurdle before the internship officially begins a few months later involves completing research projects and if possible defending the doctoral dissertation – a topic that involves another series of Psynopsis articles! I hope that this process of sharing my personal experiences will help to answer some questions for the future internship candidate. I would encourage each of you to speak with upper level students who have gone through the process, your own clinical supervisors, as well as those from other sites. I believe that the better prepared applicants will have the resources available to make the internship application, interview, and match

stages an exciting one, instead of an anxiety-ridden chore. I look forward to sharing my personal experiences on internship with you next year in the summer 2003 issue of Psynopsis. In the meantime, Good Luck to all prospective internship applicants!

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