

Students Share Their Perspective on Match Day | CPD

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A young boy is evaluated by a Clinical Services practicum student

Few days are as important in the life of a psychology doctoral student as Match Day, the day when they find out where they will be completing their required internships.

Match Day is a standard process for psychology students who are getting a Ph.D. in psychology from an American Psychology Association-approved program, said Martin Toohill, coordinator of psychological services for the Clinical Services division of Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities.

"It takes a lot of energy, a lot of money and a lot of time," Toohill said. Students must prepare their vitae, send out applications and travel for interviews prior to the official day.

According to the APA web site, students can rank their choice of between 11 and 15 internship sites. Sophisticated algorithms determine who gets placed at which particular site. Some students don't get matched to an internship site on Match Day due to a variety of factors, which means they have a year to fill before they can apply again.

According to Joseph Wanzek, who is currently completing his psychology practicum in Clinical Services and participated in the most recent Match Day, the process is competitive.

"Psychology students in graduate programs are required to participate in an internship placement as a final clinical experience to complete their degree," Wanzek said. "Certain criteria and experiences are required by graduate programs in order to participate, such as clinical exams, research publications or other competencies, obtaining a certain amount of clinical and assessment experience, etc. This means that psychology graduate students have put in a considerable amount of time and effort to be eligible for the match. Unfortunately, there are not enough internship placements available for all of the students that apply each year, so the process is competitive and there is a possibility of not matching to an internship site."

Toohill said if a student doesn't match, he or she might stick around, get a job or finish their dissertations so the internship the only requirement left. Often, those students match to a very good place the next year, because they are better prepared and have more experience that can make them a better fit.

Wanzek and fellow student Spencer Richards both landed positions at the Veterans Health Administration hospital in Salt Lake City last week during Match Day 2015. Wanzek will complete an internship and Richards, a post-doctoral fellowship.

"Match day is a scary day and an exciting day," said Richards, who completed both a graduate assistantship and a psychology practicum in Clinical Services. "For psychology trainees, it's a day you put all the trust you've got in your program and experience and hope to land in a good training site. It's a true milestone that marks a transition between trainee and professional. For both my internship and postdoctoral fellowship, I was immediately relieved that I had a professional home for the next year. It was validating and exciting to have the next step resolved and get ready for the next move."

Richards, from Elma, Wash., is currently completing his internship at the Missouri Health Sciences Psychology Consortium, at the Truman Veterans Memorial Hospital in Columbia, Missouri. He expects to graduate from USU in summer 2015 with a Ph.D. in Clinical/Counseling/School Psychology, and then begin a postdoctoral fellowship in September at the Salt Lake City VA Hospital.

"I was part of the interdisciplinary assessment team in the Autism Diagnostic Clinic," Richards said. "I conducted psychological evaluations for children (ASD, ADHD, Learning Disorders, Behavioral Disorders) as well as Social Security Disability evaluations for children and adults."

Richards said the training he received at the CPD was top-notch.

“My experiences at the CPD were pivotal in the development of my sense of myself as a professional and emerging psychologist,” Richards said. “I speak highly of my training whenever given the opportunity and credit Dr. Marty Toohill, Vicky Simonsmeier, Dr. Dennis Odell, Ryan Winn, and George Wootton, as well as the many trainees in Clinical Services, for the high caliber work they do and the impact they have in the community.”

Richards said his CPD experience helped prepare him for his upcoming post-doctoral fellowship, which will start in September.

“I received fantastic training in working collaboratively with diverse professionals, working from a person-first perspective and not defining people by their problems,” he said. “I will be working with veterans across the lifespan in doing integrated behavioral healthcare. My duties in fellowship will be primarily working to provide clinical care and engage in clinical research advancing interdisciplinary behavioral medicine for acute and chronic health problems. Some highlights include working on pre-transplant surgical teams, pre-bariatric surgery teams, chronic pain management, behavioral weight loss, behavioral consultation, home-based primary care, and geriatric assessment teams.”

Wanzek, originally from Ames, Iowa, also said his CPD experience helped prepare him as well. At the VA, he will be obtaining a generalist training, conducting evidence-based psychological assessments, interventions, and consultations with Veterans and their families.

“Clinical Services was an excellent practicum experience that helped develop my assessment skills,” he said. “Dr. Toohill was a great supervisor that helped improve my report writing and diagnostic awareness. The CPD is also an interdisciplinary setting that allowed me to interact with professionals and students in several areas including bio/medical, speech/language pathology, and occupational therapy. This type of setting fit well with the internship sites I was interested in and being able to talk about my experiences at Clinical Services really served me well during the interview process.”