DOCTORAL PROGRAM
IN
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

Virginia Commonwealth University
Fall 2021

Suzanne E. Mazzeo, Ph.D.
Program Director
Counseling Psychology Faculty

Core Faculty

Suzanne E. Mazzeo

- Professor and Director of Counseling Psychology Training
- Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Research Interests: Eating disorders, obesity and related health disparities; health behavior change, especially changing eating and exercise behaviors; cultural and contextual influences on eating and exercise behaviors, and developing culturally sensitive interventions to promote healthy eating and exercising behaviors.

Shawn O. Utsey

- Professor
- Ph.D., Fordham University
- Research Interests: Racism, culture-specific coping mechanisms, and quality of life, particularly how these constructs relate to the African American experience.

Paul Perrin

- Professor
- Ph.D., University of Florida
- Research Interests: Social justice in disability and health, which encompasses three facets: (a) cultural, familial, and international approaches to disability rehabilitation and adjustment, particularly in underserved and minority populations with neurological conditions; (b) social determinants of health (e.g., stigma, access to integrated care, personal and collective strengths); and (c) social justice approaches to understand and dismantle oppression.

Victoria A. Shivy

- Associate Professor
- Ph.D., University at Albany, State University of New York
- Research Interests: The role that work plays in peoples' lives; interventions that foster career decision-making, development, and adjustment; career transitions across populations (individuals returning to the workplace; offenders' reentry); occupational health including unhealthy workplace experiences and behaviors (compulsive work; victimization in the workplace); the impact of previous trauma on workplace adjustment; career and general psychological assessment; research methodology.

Natalie D. Dautovich

- Assistant Professor
- Ph.D., University of Florida
- Research Interests: Daily processes that anchor well-being across adulthood; specific emphases on sleep, affect, health behaviors, routines, and the role of family, social, cultural, and political contexts on daily behaviors.

**Oswaldo Moreno**

- Assistant Professor
- Ph.D., Clark University
- Research Interests: Understanding and addressing the mental healthcare disparities in the United States that affect individuals from low-income and racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. His research program includes both applied and basic research incorporating the intersection of cognitive-behavioral theories, prevention science, and cultural and contextual approaches including psychology of religion and spirituality.

**Shawn C. T. Jones**

- Assistant Professor
- Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Research Interests: Challenging, clarifying and correcting the narrative concerning risk and resilience for Black youth and their families. Enhancing understanding of the interplay between race-related risk (e.g., racial discrimination, racism-related stress) and protective factors (e.g., racial identity, racial socialization, Africentricity) that influence Black youth psychological wellbeing.

**Mary Beth Heller**

- Assistant Professor and Director, Center for Psychological Services and Development
- Ph.D., University of Virginia
- Research/Professional Interests: Training and supervision of graduate students; peer consultation groups; psychological and psychoeducational assessment; individual psychotherapy from an evidence-based integrative model; school psychology.

**Affiliate Faculty**

**Jared Keeley**

- Associate Professor
- Ph.D., Auburn University
- Research Interests: Classification of psychopathology, especially concerning mental health professionals’ use of the diagnostic system. This includes cognitive processes involved in clinicians’ work, including diagnosis, case conceptualization and treatment planning. A second interest is the scholarship of teaching and learning, particularly the qualities and behaviors of excellent teachers that lead to superior learning.
Emeritus Faculty

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

- Professor and Former Chair, Department of Psychology
- Ph.D. University of Missouri
- Research Interests: Forgiveness; positive psychology; marriage and marital interventions; religious values.

Steven J. Danish

- Professor Emeritus, and Former Chair, ABPP Former Director, Life Skills Center (www.lifeskills.vcu.edu)
- Ph.D., Michigan State University
- Research Interests: Developing, implementing and evaluating life skills programs for youth, adults and families, especially returning veterans and their families; using sport to teach life skills internationally; community psychology; health and nutrition.

Robert M. Tipton

- Professor Emeritus
- Ph.D., University of Missouri
- Research Interests: Ethical and training issues; psychological assessment.

Jean Corcoran

- Assistant Professor
- Ph.D., Virginia Commonwealth University
- Research/Professional Interests: Processes of therapeutic interventions, linguistic analysis, substance abuse, couples and group therapy.
Philosophy, Goals, and Training Model

Additional information on the program can be found in the VCU Graduate Bulletin.

Program Mission Statement

Counseling psychology is a specialty within healthcare psychology (see the Society of Counseling Psychology website, Division 17 of the American Psychological Association, for a formal definition of counseling psychology). Our training follows the scientist-practitioner model, leading to a Ph.D. degree in psychology; we do not offer a terminal master’s degree. The program seeks to advance the field of counseling psychology through innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to science and service provision, while preserving the field’s core traditions. We offer generalist training and exposure to multiple theoretical models, however we also have a distinctive slant toward counseling health psychology.

Specifically, the faculty and students will be well-prepared to engage in:

- Applied research
- Evidence-based clinical practice
- The integration of research and practice

In addition, faculty and students will be well-prepared to emphasize diversity in all areas of their professional lives. Students are well-prepared for a variety of career paths, including working as faculty in academic or medical school settings, and implementing and evaluating interventions in hospital, community, university or other clinical venues. Upon graduation, students are competent scientists, well-prepared for licensure as doctoral-level psychologists with the knowledge and skills to engage in evidence-based practice consistent with the highest ethical and professional standards.

Defining Counseling Psychology

Counseling psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is defined as a healthcare science and profession, integrating cutting-edge psychological science, professional practice, and professional and community leadership, with excellence, to help people improve their life skills throughout the life span. At VCU, counseling psychology has both scientific and applied foci.

Our view of counseling psychology parallels the evolution of counseling psychology as a field, in that it has become more broadly conceived and diverse over time. Traditionally¹, counseling psychology has involved three roles: remedial, preventive, and educative and developmental. Gelso and Fretz¹ identified five unifying themes of the field--themes of focusing on

a) intact personalities,

b) people's assets and strengths,

c) relatively brief interventions,

d) person-environment interactions, and

e) educational and career development and environments.

However, Gelso and Fretz also observed that the diversity of what counseling psychologists do was increasing. As noted recently (Delgado-Romero, Lau & Shullman, 2012), counseling psychology has evolved over the years, but a set of broad core values continue to underlie and define its identity and professional activities (p. 4). Our program continues to endorse strongly a scientist-practitioner model emphasizing the main functions we attempt to train students in and exhibit as faculty. We emphasize counseling health psychology across the program, and we seek to be the recognized leader in this important and growing subfield of counseling psychology. Most faculty and students do research and engage in some practice in counseling health psychology. We are placed within a department with a strong emphasis in health psychology or clinical-counseling health psychology. Over three-quarters of the faculty have achieved funding on health-related research topics. In addition, VCU is strongly associated with excellence in health, and our emphasis on counseling health psychology allows a multitude of collaborations and opportunities. The secondary emphasis in the program is community psychology. We seek to be relevant in science, practice, and leadership to the local, state, national, and international communities. The tertiary emphasis in the program is on positive psychology, including research on character strengths and positive life skills, like vocational development.

At VCU, our operationalization of counseling psychology affirms the roles and themes identified by Gelso and Fretz and reaffirmed by Packard (2009) and Delgado et al. (2012), but we have perhaps more broadly interpreted some of the applications than many of our more traditional counseling psychology colleagues. Commitment to a scientific approach to counseling psychology has remained a central goal of the program. Furthermore, as a program housed in an urban center, we have placed an emphasis on and commitment to developing, implementing and evaluating scientifically based, health- and community-based strategies and interventions designed to not only positively affect the lives of the people we might target, but to increase our understanding of fundamental psychological and social justice principles that might help us develop even more effective interventions. Three pervasive threads run through our training:

a) an emphasis on working collaboratively with scientists and professionals from a variety of disciplines
b) the integration of health psychology as it pertains to behavior, promotion, and intervention
c) a focus on the community, promotion of individual and family development, and multiculturalism and social justice

We are also proud that our long-standing emphasis in behavioral health is now being recommended as an important activity to integrate in the education and training of counseling psychology doctoral students. Indeed, we are one of a few counseling psychology programs that are active members of the Council for Clinical Health Psychology Training programs (CCHPTP). We provide, as a program, some exposure to clinical health psychology, but individual students have ample opportunities to gather enough training and experience to be considered to have a concentration in the area of clinical health psychology.


Two principles underlie our training model as a scientist-practitioner program:

1) We seek to produce competent scientists who value a **scientific worldview** whether they pursue a career in academia, practice, administration, or consultation.

2) We seek to produce **competent healthcare practitioners** who can provide both brief counseling and traditional psychotherapy, as well as develop expertise in areas such as group, family, or community interventions. Additionally, we train our students in the indirect provision of services, such as consultation, supervision and administration.

We believe that counseling psychologists must be flexible and innovative. Students must be able to **integrate science and practice skills** so that they will be poised to function in whatever professional capacity is necessary. Additionally, an emphasis on self-awareness and multicultural awareness is incorporated into each of the aforementioned principles. We are aware that no one student, or individual for that matter, can be equally proficient in all of these areas. However, we expect our students to function effectively in all settings and excel in at least one of these areas.

**Science**

A thorough grounding in research strategies, theories, and content of psychology provides a foundation for mastering the applied knowledge and skills of the profession. Students are expected to emerge from the doctoral program with the scientific skills to function as an active psychologist. Research training is an ongoing integral part of the counseling psychology graduate program at VCU, and all students receive excellent training in scientific and scholarly skills. Although faculty differ in their individual strengths, overall, faculty are adept at providing training in research design and statistics, psychometrics, hypothesis testing, and other research and statistical methods that are consistent with the latest standards and recommendations in the field. In addition, some faculty provide opportunities for training in action research, qualitative methods, and other useful and respected (albeit less traditionally used) methods of research and statistical analysis. As a fully functioning program within a Department of Psychology, we can provide a full array of opportunities for scientific training for students willing to exert the initiative to seek special opportunities. Faculty will help facilitate such opportunities toward shaping students' careers in useful and productive ways.

The *sine qua non* of research training is that faculty and students are expected to publish scientific theory and research in the most respected sources in psychology, obtain competitively funded research support from prestigious federal agencies and foundations, and disseminate their findings widely to appropriate audiences to help people improve their life skills. All students are expected to submit articles (and chapters) for publication during their training, to present at regional and (where possible) national conventions, to be involved in grant submission (where possible), and to pursue other publication of their research and thinking.

Faculty members have ongoing programs in research and scholarship that serve as models for students, focus research activities for students, and contribute widely to positively affecting people's life skills, and faculty members actively involve graduate students in research and scholarship. In some cases, students who are aiming at careers within academics can supervise (under the direction of faculty) undergraduate students who participate in research internships, which helps prepare graduate students for some of the supervision and training they might do as future faculty members. In addition, a teaching practicum class

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and some opportunities to teach undergraduate classes (once graduate students have master's degrees) can help prepare students aiming at a career in academia. Being grounded in the scientific-empirical approach to psychology leads the practitioner to a valuable way of conceptualizing problems. As scientist-practitioners, students should be "at home" planning and carrying out research just as they are able to function with excellence as practitioners. Further, they incorporate research findings into their practice and seek to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice.

**Practice**

Training in Counseling Psychology prepares individuals to help people develop important life skills through promoting positive development of life skills, preventing personal, interpersonal, and community problems, and aiding people who are experiencing a broad range of emotional, social, behavioral, or community problems. Training as a counseling psychologist involves developing skills necessary to thrive personally and economically in the twenty-first century. These skills could involve core skills at counseling, such as:

1) assessment of individuals and of naturally occurring and ad hoc groups  
2) brief counseling  
3) therapeutic approaches (including psychotherapy and group, couple, and family therapies)  
4) supervision (clinical and administrative) of mental health practitioners  
5) multicultural competency  
6) program conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation – and other useful skills that not all students will find equally relevant for their career (but which opportunities are available for students to develop if they take the initiative) – such as,  
   a) consultation  
   b) media relations  
      i) disseminating programs widely  
      ii) exposure to and involvement in public policy issues  
7) administration related to independent practice; and  
8) developing teaching skills and other skills needed to thrive in an academic career

Students with particular interests in the latter skills are expected to seek experiences that help them develop expertise in high-interest areas. Faculty members help guide students in making wise choices and facilitate their pursuit of experiences. Not all students will have all training experiences.

The core of practice training focuses on developing excellent communication skills, which are applied to work with people who have mild to moderate psychological disturbance or marked but transient situational disturbances. Those communication skills might involve many aspects of practice -- such as seeing clients/patients, consulting, conducting psychoeducational (or other types of groups), teaching university classes, and developing other communication skills.

It is, of course, impossible to predict the future, however, the best judgment of our faculty is that most beginning graduate students who are embarking on their pursuit of a Ph.D. in counseling psychology will not work in full time counseling or psychotherapy practice when they graduate (though probably some will). Although excellent clinical and counseling skills are necessary for a person to be a competent counseling psychologist, our graduate students are expected to develop a wide array of practice skills during their training program at VCU and in their internship. Finally, for years, our program has emphasized the importance of training to work in community and behavioral health. Our training perspective was affirmed when Forrest and Campbell called for the counseling psychology training...
councils to develop a blueprint describing ways that counseling psychology programs might include curricula and practice opportunities that prepare counseling psychology students for the increasing demands of behavioral health psychology practice in our changing health care delivery system. (p.146)

The VCU Counseling psychology program already has these mechanisms for training in place.

**Excellence**

Counseling Psychology at VCU received APA\(^7\) provisional approval in 1982 and accreditation in 1985. The program has achieved recognition for its excellence. The program has been nationally ranked in the top programs in counseling psychology since its initial recognition in 1995\(^8\). However, with our renewed emphases on health and community as well as multicultural issues, our faculty and students are tending to publish in excellent journal outlets outside of the traditional journals that are used in determining rank order of programs by publications. In the most recent review, VCU’s program fared well, remaining in the “top tier of programs (ranked 9),” but not as well as in previous years.\(^9\) More recently, in a broader review, the program earned national recognition for excellence in research. According to the January 12, 2007 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education, the counseling psychology program ranked third nationally among counseling psychology programs, based on a scholarly productivity index. Faculty and students at VCU are actively engaged in important research that is widely cited. Moreover, many of our faculty members consistently are awarded federal, state and local grants and contracts supporting their research and thereby our graduate students. Our graduate students have applied for and have won NIH grants and other national awards.

Several of our faculty members have been recognized with major awards for their scholarly work. Besides excellence in publishing research, though, the Counseling Psychology program offers excellence in practitioner training. Graduate students receive high quality supervision in assessment and counseling psychotherapy. Additionally, opportunities are available to conduct psychoeducational interventions in community, medical, school, religious, and business settings. Graduate students usually embark on their internships with substantial in-depth counseling and assessment experience and opportunities to obtain other applied experience in broader contexts.

Our program endorses the slogan, "Counseling Psychologists Leading with Excellence," which reflects our expectation that doctoral graduates from our program will be leaders in the field—in both science and practice. The faculty hopes to model leadership, teach it, and foster it during students' tenure here and beyond.

**Skills, Competencies, and Future Employment of Graduate Students**

Traditional work settings for counseling psychologists include university psychology departments, college and university counseling centers, Veterans Administration hospitals and clinics, and community mental health centers. In recent years, the range of work settings has broadened as counseling psychologists have begun to apply their skills to previously neglected problem areas and target populations. These include such settings and/or populations as research institutions, general medical hospitals and medical centers,

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\(^7\) Commission of Accreditation, 750 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Telephone: 202-336-5957


crisis intervention centers, business and industry, community, and correctional settings. Reflective of our emphasis on training leaders, one of our graduates took a position as a congressional fellow for APA and is now a university faculty member. Many obtain outstanding post-doctoral fellowships and others have won major national awards. Although students are encouraged by the Counseling Psychology Program to develop some subset of specific skills and expertise, training is broad based and, upon graduating, students should be prepared to function in a variety of settings and should be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of society.

### Model for Educating and Training Counseling Psychologists

The goal of the Counseling Psychology Program at VCU is to educate and train competent Counseling Psychologists as defined by the above conceptualization of the field. To this end, the Counseling Psychology Program endorses the scientist-practitioner model, seeks to promote leadership, and strives to engender an attitude of excellence in students.

#### Science

In the first year of graduate study, students take core psychology courses, which expose them to theory, content, and methodology of psychology as a science. To develop their skills as scientists further, students complete a research methods course in their first year. In this course, students are introduced to the process of conducting and disseminating research in counseling psychology with the goal of developing their thesis proposal. Students also work with their advisors on research teams.

Two research projects are required prior to graduation: one leading to the master's thesis and another leading to the doctoral dissertation. Students are required to work with a member of the Psychology faculty who will act as the student's supervisor for masters or doctoral research. Students are expected to participate with their advisors on research teams on an ongoing basis from the moment they arrive. We aim to help every student publish, at a minimum, one article or chapter by the time he or she graduates, as well as present their research at national conferences. We hope that whether the student works primarily as a faculty member or in an applied job after graduation, the s/he/they will continue to think and act scientifically.

#### Practice

To sharpen their skills as practitioners, students take a number of core counseling courses. These classes focus on the theory, content, and practice of counseling and psychotherapy and its basis in psychology. Those core counseling courses are an integral part of the program from the beginning to the end of graduate study. From their first semester, students are expected to be aware of multicultural issues, which pervade both science and practice domains. Students have the opportunity to integrate course, research, and practicum knowledge into practice. The practicum sequence begins the second year and continues throughout the curriculum, culminating in a one-year internship after the completion of all course work. Students are also required to complete a course aimed at multicultural awareness and fostering development of multicultural sensitivity (PSYC 676). Besides those required counseling courses that have been judged as essential to the development of a well-trained counseling psychologist, students may elect other skills-related courses depending upon their particular interests. Beyond coursework, though, real opportunities exist to gather other experiences -- (e.g., by participating in the group therapy sequence at the University Counseling Center, by providing treatment via the HRSA-funded Primary Care clinic; and by leading psycho-educational groups on research projects).
In addition to their broad-based training in counseling psychology, students develop an area of concentration consistent with their interests and career goals. Although the program is designed to educate counseling psychologists in a broad, general sense, students are also given an opportunity to develop some specific competencies. Areas of concentration, designed by students and their advisors as a required part of the doctoral program, are comprised of a combination of formal courses, independent study, research, practica, workshops, and related experiences. The purpose is, within the context of the student's broad-based educational experience, to structure his or her elective activity into some coherent content cluster. The content of an area of concentration may consist of a target population, work setting, or some special research or skill area. Some examples of areas of concentration are health psychology, adolescent populations, research methodology, multicultural issues, and community mental health.

Although students are encouraged to develop an expertise in some particular facet of counseling psychology – an area of concentration -- the program is designed to impart a broad base of counseling skills applicable to a range of problems in a variety of settings. It is recognized that most of the graduates of this training program will not work primarily as career counselors; however, competency in that area is considered fundamental to the role of the counseling psychologist and is an integral part of our training program as is competency in psychotherapy (especially brief psychotherapy). For example, students are encouraged to conduct career assessments with their clients, when appropriate.

Students generally take three (or more) years of practica. In years two and three of the program, they spend 9 months at the University Counseling Services and 9 months at the Center for Psychological Services and Development. In year four, students select an off-campus practicum experience. Please note, students must have defended their thesis and be in good standing in their current practicum to be considered for any off-campus practicum opportunity. Most students choose to do a full year practicum in their fourth year. Most also complete an off-campus practicum in their fifth year. In all practicum settings, students receive on-site supervision and also attend weekly staff meetings and in-service training sessions.

The counseling program faculty members do not subscribe to a single theoretical orientation; rather they provide a variety of role models for students. No pressure is exerted on students to develop any particular theoretical approach; however, there is a strong emphasis placed on evidence-based practice. Students are exposed to counseling theories early in their graduate school career, and are expected to make explicit their own theory of counseling or psychotherapy. Consistent with the scientist-practitioner model, we stress in the program that students’ (counselors’) therapeutic interventions should flow logically both from the evidence base and from their theoretical perspective. Students are expected to be familiar and competent at employing a variety of evidence-based practices in psychology.

**Summary**

To summarize, the counseling psychologist has a flexible role with a threefold function--promoting prevention, amelioration or rehabilitation, and growth--across the life span. The aim of our program is to prepare students to be scientists, practitioners, leaders, and models of excellence.
Requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Counseling Psychology

The Advisor

All graduate students are assigned an academic advisor when they enter the program. That advisor will be a core faculty member in counseling psychology. During admissions, efforts are made to match students with advisors according to students' expression of their likely research interests. The advisor will serve as the student's academic advisor as well as his or her research advisor. Although it may be possible for a student to change advisors, it is expected that the student will work with his/her/their assigned advisor throughout their time in the program. The master's thesis is thought to be a research apprenticeship in which students learn the fundamentals of the research and publication process from their advisor and receive general mentorship on developing as a counseling psychologist. Students are also expected to work with their advisors on research projects not associated with theses or dissertations. Often this process promotes collaborations between faculty members as well as students from other labs.

The Master of Science Degree

All students must complete the master's degree before being formally admitted for doctoral study. Occasionally, students who have already earned master’s degrees are admitted to the program. Previous coursework is considered for transfer on a course-by-course basis. In addition, such students who have already achieved an earned master’s degree may ask to have their master’s thesis evaluated. To receive a waiver from doing another thesis, the thesis must be evaluated as equivalent in quality to one completed at VCU.

Semester Hour Requirements

For the requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Psychology see the VCU Graduate Bulletin.

Transfer of Credits

No more than 9 hours of transfer credit will be accepted toward the master's degree.
Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Counseling Psychology

Degree requirements for the Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology can be found in the VCU Graduate Bulletin.

The Advisor

Students continue to work with their academic advisor after being granted formal continuance for the Ph.D. The academic advisor is generally the dissertation supervisor. It is also possible for the student to name a dissertation chairperson who is not on the Core Counseling faculty, though typically if the dissertation supervisor is not in the Department of Psychology, a co-chair in counseling is appointed.

Continuance in the Doctoral Program

Within two weeks of defending his/her/their master’s thesis, each student must prepare, with his/her/their advisor, a program of doctoral study. This program sets forth the course work, practica, and other related learning experiences the student intends to fulfill in pursuit of the Ph.D. degree. This is considered to be a “semi-formal” contract with the faculty. Any substantive deviation from this document of continuance, once it has been approved, requires that the student submit a request to modify the program to the faculty for its consideration for approval. Important parts of the continuance program are the articulation and design of:

1) an area of concentration, and
2) a demonstration of multicultural awareness, sensitivity, and skill development.

Students must apply to the doctoral program within two weeks following the defense of their master’s thesis (or two weeks after the beginning of fall semester if the defense occurs after May 1 in the preceding academic year; or in the second week of their fifth regular semester if they enter the program with an acceptable master’s thesis already completed). The faculty will respond to the requests for continuance in the doctoral program by ACCEPT, REJECT, OR DELAY ACTION. If the decision is DELAY ACTION, the faculty will specify to the student what is to be done before they will again consider the student's application. Significant deficits in any of the following areas are sufficient grounds to reject an application:

a) academic performance
b) practitioner competence
c) research interest and promise
d) ethical behavior
e) commitment to the program and
f) personal development and maturity

Students who have not completed their master’s thesis before their fifth regular semester are subject to the departmental policy of progressively reduced credit loads (see the Departmental Handbook of Requirements and Regulations for more details). Students are advised to apply for continuance as soon as possible after their thesis defense in that they have no official status in graduate school at VCU between receipt of the master’s degree and acceptance for continuance in the doctoral program.

Read about VCU Graduate School’s policy on Degree Candidacy.
Read about the policy for the counseling psychology program specifically (scroll to #4).

### Semester Hour Requirements

See the VCU Graduate Bulletin for the minimum number of semester credit hours beyond the baccalaureate degree required toward the completion of the doctorate.

### Required Courses

Please review the VCU Graduate Bulletin (link in previous section) for the requirements (scroll down to the section “Curriculum Requirements” to see the coursework required for the doctoral degree).

### Area of Concentration

All students, in consultation with their advisors, are required to develop an area of concentration which is outlined in their continuance application. The area of concentration involves a unified, coherent set of experiences designed to develop the student's knowledge and skills in a focal area within the context of his or her broad training as a counseling psychologist. Areas of concentration of past students have included: health psychology, vocational psychology, multicultural approaches, research methodology, and geropsychology. Students with other interests are strongly encouraged to develop compatible subspecialties. The concentration involves academic and practical experiential components. Academic preparation consists of a sequence of courses aimed at developing a solid foundation in the area of concentration.

Normally this will consist of

- a) completing 2 graduate-level courses related to the concentration over and above the required curriculum or
- b) completing 1 graduate-level course related to the concentration above the required core curriculum and 1 (~60-hour) didactic experience.

Areas of concentration should integrate didactic and experiential preparation. This may include relevant practicum experiences, teaching assistantships, volunteer or paid work experiences, research experiences, and/or internship experiences. It should be stressed that the area of concentration is not the core of the counseling program, and does not constitute any formal skill, but rather it represents a focal area for elective courses.

### Counseling Practicum Courses

Practicum experiences are an integral part of the training program. Including both master's and doctoral requirements, at least 12 credit hours of counseling practicum at VCU are required of students before completion of the doctoral program. These required practica begin at VCU's University Counseling Services in the student's second year. In the third year, students are placed at the Department's Center for Psychological Services and Development in the Multicultural Clinic. Most students enroll in additional practicum hours, over the course of their training. Whenever students are engaged in any sort of practical experience, they must be enrolled in counseling program practicum credits (1 credit, particularly during the summer). A more detailed description of the rationale and objectives for each practicum is contained in a separate section (see Practica below).
*NOTE*: In order to ensure that each student completes 6 credits of practicum prior to obtaining their Master’s, students should register for 3 credits each semester regardless of whether they are placed at UCS or CPSD.

**Multicultural Awareness, Sensitivity, and Skills**

Students must demonstrate that they have been exposed to a variety of cultures, have made an effort to become aware of their own culturally-based values and attitudes throughout their graduate education, and have developed skills as part of an ongoing commitment to increasing their multicultural competence. This may include:

- experience working with a variety of clients (e.g., races, ethnicity, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations) different from the student
- course work (full courses or parts of courses) in cross cultural counseling, theory, and research into a culture different than the student's
- other multicultural experiences

In describing their multicultural awareness, sensitivity, and skills in their application for continuance in the doctoral program, students are encouraged to go beyond merely listing experiences and to adduce evidence of their multicultural training in psychological science and practice.

**Research**

A counseling psychologist is first a psychologist, then a specialist in counseling. As such, science is an integral part of the entire training program at VCU. All students are expected to work with their advisors in their first year and take a seminar that introduces them to research methodology and facilitates their work on their master’s thesis. Students must complete three formal research projects before graduation -- the master's thesis, the doctoral dissertation, and also the research portion of the doctoral preliminary examination. Students entering VCU with a completed master's thesis in psychology (not just a research project) that is evaluated to be of comparable quality to those produced at VCU (as judged by the faculty) will be exempted from the thesis. Students who have not completed an acceptable master's thesis prior to entering VCU must complete the master's degree at VCU prior to beginning doctoral work. Students are expected to complete their theses prior to the beginning of their fifth semester.

Dissertations should be completed prior to leaving for internship. Although this is not a formal rule, students have found this to be prudent advice. Completing a dissertation while on internship is burdensome and few can accomplish it. Putting off completion of the dissertation until after internship can result in delays in employment, lower salary, and even failure to complete the dissertation. **Students will be required to postpone the internship application process until the following year if they have not had their dissertation proposals approved at least two weeks prior to their first internship deadline, or October 1 of the year they submit internship applications (whichever date comes first).** Besides the two required research projects, students (as counseling psychologists) are expected to be active in research efforts throughout their time at VCU and throughout their professional lives.

The research portion of the doctoral preliminary examination can be submitted in either March or September of the year after the thesis is completed and the doctoral continuance approved. (See the Preliminary Examination section for details regarding submission timelines). This is an independently done, non-thesis research paper. This is to be completed with no input in writing, analyzing and interpreting data, and discussing the outcomes with any faculty member. This is intended to be an
independent project that, only after this draft has been deemed acceptable as fulfilling the research portion of the preliminary examination, can involve the major professor and student collaborators. (It is understood that the research advisor will be involved in preparing and overseeing the IRB for the project, but should not be involved other than normal IRB involvement.) Students who would like assistance with their writing are permitted to consult with the VCU Writing Center.

**Internship**

Counseling Psychology doctoral students are required to complete an internship that must be one calendar year of full-time supervised counseling experience. The internship site is expected to be APA accredited. Students should be considering potential types of internship sites (e.g., counseling center, VA Medical Center, academic medical center, community mental health center), no later than the time they apply to external practicum in their rising fourth year. This is because students generally seek external practicum opportunities that are particularly relevant to their internship and postdoctoral goals, and build upon their training experiences at UCS and CPSD. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss both external practica and internship options with their advisors and clinical supervisors. These efforts can help ensure that the training opportunities sought are an optimal fit with the student’s goals. Students are required to submit (to the DCT) a list of the internships to which they plan to apply prior to submitting their applications. Students must seek prior written approval before applying to any unaccredited sites, and cannot rank an unaccredited site without prior written approval of program faculty. Details about the timeline of the internship application process, including submission of materials to the DCT, are shared in detail in multiple meetings held each year. Please reach out to the DCT if you have additional questions.

Before being allowed to submit their rank APPIC applications, all students must have passed both parts of the doctoral preliminary examination, be in good standing, have had their dissertation proposal approved, and be approved by the counseling faculty and director of training. A more detailed description of the rationale and objectives for the internship is contained in a separate section.

**Student Employment**

*Note: All work that is psychological in nature performed by students while in the graduate program in counseling psychology, whether or not it is for pay, must be approved by the Counseling faculty and students must seek approval following the guidelines outlined on the Second Job Policy (VCU PSYC Second Job Policy).* Per this policy, the second job must not ever exceed 8 hours/week for a GTA/GRA/DA. Hourly employees must never have more than 28 hours/week from all jobs. Factors considered prior to approving work activity is whether or not the student is receiving adequate supervision, and progress and performance in clinical work and research. Students, except in some instances, must be enrolled for at least one credit of practicum while working, including summers, if the work requires faculty or staff resources (i.e., is at CPSD). Practicum or (counseling-related) work not involving VCU resources requires approval in writing by the Director of Training, who must maintain a current set of approvals for all practica and other work so that the student is covered by VCU insurance.

**Practica**

First-year students are required to take Theories of Counseling and Interviewing (PSYC 651). This course trains students in basic counseling skills and the integration of theory with practice. Personal Awareness in Multicultural Counseling (PSYC 676), also a master’s requirement, helps students increase their multicultural awareness and skills. In the second and third years, students complete on-campus
Counseling Practicum at UCS and CPSD). \{Note: if a student expects to complete the Masters requirements – defend their thesis -- prior to the end of their second year, they should plan on taking at least 3 credits per semester of practicum to meet the 6 credit requirement for practicum.\}

Students complete two semesters (Fall through Spring) at the VCU University Counseling Services (UCS) and one year at the Department's Center for Psychological Services and Development (CPSD) Multicultural Clinic. Students are typically placed first in UCS and then at the CPSD. CPSD practicum begins with clinic orientation in late July/early August prior to Fall semester and continues through the end of Summer term the following year. Students moving to external practicum in the summer at the end of their CPSD year should consult with both their CPSD and external practicum supervisors about the timing of their transition.

During the fourth and fifth years, students in good standing, (which includes having defended their thesis and being in good clinical standing in their previous practica), are eligible to apply for an advanced, external practicum placement. These externals practica last for a minimum of the academic year (although they sometimes begin and/or end in the summer semesters, as negotiated by the students and supervisor). External placements do not extend longer than one year without reapplication (and the department’s policy is that sites must have an opening for a new student in addition to retaining any other students). Students sometimes earn additional clinical hours by carrying a small caseload of clients through the summer, or participating in a supplementary traineeship (e.g., through TEENS, Primary Care, etc). Nearly all students complete an additional off-campus practicum in their fifth year.

Practica are graded on a "Pass/Fail" basis, and supervisors complete written evaluations of each student. The Director of Training is responsible for assigning grades, but the judgment of the student's primary supervisor will determine whether the student passes. In cases where a supervisor perceives significant deficits in a student's performance, s/he/they may be required to complete additional remedial practicum work.

External (advanced) practica are selected based on the student's area of concentration and internship and postdoctoral goals. Students may work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, community mental health agencies, corrections, college counseling centers, or community outreach programs. These practica are arranged through the DCTs of the Counseling and Clinical Programs and depend on approval of the site, the content area, and the availability of a psychologist to supervise the student. Practicum sites are selective in the type of prerequisite skills they require of students. Advanced planning with corresponding course work and training experiences will help ensure an optimal external placement.

## Tracking Your Supervised Clinical Hours

Most students choose to pay a small annual fee to track their clinical hours on Time2Track. This site tracks all clinical hours in line with APPIC reporting. In the long run, attention to practicum hour details will save you weeks of stressful labor. The Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) has adopted a standardized application form. A part of the application form contains definitions of practicum hours, which apply to the Practicum Hours Data spreadsheet. Another part of the APPI form requires very detailed information about practicum experience.
Sample Model Program

This is only a sample schedule; please consult with your advisor and the Program Director; also please note the program requirements outlined in the VCU Graduate Bulletin (scroll down to Curriculum Requirements). Students are expected to complete five years on campus before their clinical internship year. This greatly facilitates completion of the dissertation before starting internship. It also helps students complete more clinical hours and research publications, and strengthens their internship and postdoctoral applications.

First Year

Fall

- PSYC 616 Psychopathology (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 680 Statistics in Psychological Res I (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 644 Intelligence Assessment (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 619 Learning and Cognition (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 675 Ethical Principles in Psychology (2 credit hours)
- PSYC 798 Thesis (1 credit hour)

Note: Six thesis credits are required for the master’s degree, and students must be enrolled in 798 during the semesters in which they propose and defend their thesis. No more than six thesis credits can be counted toward the M.S. degree.

Total credits: 15

Spring

- PSYC 608/684 Research Methods in Psychology (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 681 Statistics in Psychological Res II (3 credit hours)
- PSYC 651 Theories of Counseling & Interviewing (3 credit hours)
- **PSYC 676 Personal Awareness in Multicultural Counseling (3 credit hours)**
  
  *This course is offered every other year, so first years entering the program in a year when PSYC 676 is not offered, need to take the course in the spring of their second year and will instead take PSYC 611 in the Spring of their first year.*

- **GRAD 673 Topics in Diversity (2 credit hours)**

- **PSYC 798 Thesis (1 credit hour)**
  
  *Note: Six thesis credits are required for the master’s degree, and students must be enrolled in 798 during the semesters in which they propose and defend their thesis. No more than six thesis credits can be counted toward the M.S. degree.*

  Total credits: 15

**Summer**

- **WORK ON THESIS**

**Second Year**

**Fall**

- **PSYC 629 Biological Basis of Behavior (3 credit hours)**

- **PSYC 643 Psychological Measurement (2 credit hours) or PSYC 682 (Advanced Multivariate Methods in Psychology, 3 credit hours)**
  
  *Instructor permission required to enroll in PSYC 682 instead of PSYC 643.*

- **PSYC 603 Developmental Processes (3 credit hours)**

- **PSYC 693 Counseling Practicum (3 credit hours, at UCS)**

- **PSYC 798 Thesis (2-3 credit hours)**
  
  *Note: Six thesis credits are required for the master’s degree, and students must be enrolled in 798 during the semesters in which they propose and defend their thesis. No more than six thesis credits can be counted toward the M.S. degree.*

  Total credits: 14
Spring

- PSYC 625 Career Dev. & Occupational. Health (3 credit hours)
  *This course is offered every other year, so first years entering the program in a year when PSYC 625 is not offered, need to take the course in the spring of their second year and will instead take another required course in the Spring of their first year.*

- PSYC 611 Contemp. Developments in Counseling. Psychology (3 credit hours)
  *Note: PSYC 611 is offered every other year, so students will take either 611 or 676.*

- PSYC 693 Counseling Practicum (3 credits, at UCS)

- PSYC 798 Thesis (2-3 credit hours)

- PSYC 619 Seminar in Learning/Cognition (3 credit hours, if not taken in Fall)

- could take--PSYC 660 Health Psychology (3 credit hours) or PSYC 679 Culture, Ethnicity & Health or PSYC 655 Community Interventions

- DEFEND THESIS AND APPLY FOR CONTINUANCE

  Total credits: 14/15

Third (or Years Three and Four Mixed)

Fall

- 645 Personality Assessment (3 credit hours)
  *(This course is offered every other year).*

- PSYC 630 Social Psychology (3 credit hours)

- PSYC 6XX Elective (3 credit hours)

- PSYC 693 Counseling Practicum (2-3 credit hours, at CPSD Multicultural Clinic—begins in late-July/early Aug prior to Fall semester with orientation and continues through end of summer the following year.
  *Practicum credits may vary during the fall and spring semesters.*
- PSYC 898 Dissertation (3 credit hours)
  
  *Dissertation credits can vary and depends on the student’s projected effort for that semester. Students must take a total of 12 credits to graduate.*

- Total credits: 14/15

**Spring**

- PSYC 6XX Elective (3 credit hours)

- PSYC 6XX Elective (3 credit hours)

- PSYC 693 Counseling Practicum
  Practicum credits may vary during the fall and spring semesters.

- PSYC 898 Dissertation (3 credit hours)

- Dissertation credits can vary and depends on the student’s projected effort for that semester. Students must take a total of 12 credits to graduate.

- SUBMIT CASE STUDY OR RESEARCH PAPER FOR PRELIMS BY MARCH 15

  - Total credits: 14/15

**Summer**

- SUBMIT RESEARCH PAPER OR CASE STUDY FOR PRELIMS BY SEPTEMBER 1

**Fourth/Fifth Year**

- Complete Prelims (if not already completed)

- PSYC 898 Dissertation (3 credit hours)

- Apply for internship
Fifth or Sixth Year

- **PSYC 696 Internship** [.5 credit for every semester while working as a full-time intern—3 total semesters, as internship is a 12-month position and thus occurs in the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters]. **Please note: internship credit must be taken in this precise order: Fall, Spring, Summer, to ensure continuous enrollment.**

Student Evaluation and Feedback Throughout the Doctoral Program

**Evaluation of Students and Feedback**

Periodic evaluations that reflect students' overall performance will be made in addition to grades received in individual courses. Evaluation is not merely for the purposes of determining whether or not students are successful in the program, but evaluation is designed so that meaningful feedback can be given. The purpose of the feedback is to acknowledge positive performance and to provide students who may not be functioning up to criteria with information and guidance that should help them in areas for growth. Therefore, the first formal evaluation occurs early in the program.

All students currently enrolled in the program are **required** to complete an annual activity report for APA record keeping. Students are also required to submit a current vita annually to the program director. Both the report and the vita are necessary to fulfill APA requirements and maintain continuous accreditation.

Students are encouraged to stay in close contact with their advisors and should feel free to seek feedback at any time they desire. Also, students are encouraged to give impressions of the program and make suggestions for improvement. Students are evaluated annually as they progress through the M.S. program in Counseling Psychology.

**First Evaluation**

The first formal evaluation of students is conducted near the end of the second semester of the first year of graduate study. At this time, the Counseling Program Committee collects and discusses quantitative and qualitative information relative to each student's performance. This evaluation is focused primarily on academic performance, practitioner skills demonstrated in pre-practicum (PSYC 651), and personal characteristics (interpersonal style such as motivation and classroom participation) as evaluated by professors. After the evaluations have been completed, students will be notified in writing and will make appointments with their respective advisors for feedback. A summary of the feedback will be placed in the student's file.

**Second Evaluation**

The second formal evaluation is made during the second semester of the second year of graduate study at VCU. Again, the committee collects and discusses qualitative and quantitative information relative to the student's performance in the program to date. By this time, all students will have completed at least one
semester of their second year practicum. The same performance dimensions forming the basis of the first evaluation are also considered at this time. In making the evaluation, the committee will also consider each student's progress on his or her thesis. As in the first evaluation, students will receive feedback from their advisors, and a summary of the feedback will be placed in the student's file.

**Third Evaluation**

Within two weeks after defending the master's thesis and completing all required coursework for the master's degree, or within two weeks of the fifth semester of school if the faculty has accepted an already completed master’s thesis, the student must submit to the faculty a request for continuation and approval for the doctoral program. At that time, the student will be thoroughly evaluated on the basis of academic performance, practitioner competence, research interest and promise, ethical behavior, commitment to the program, and personal development and maturity. Satisfactory evaluations written when the student was completing his/her/their master’s degree do not necessarily assure continuance in the doctoral program. After a decision concerning continuance is made by the Counseling Program faculty, the proposed doctoral programs of approved continuing students will be evaluated.

**Fourth Evaluation**

The fourth formal evaluation takes place when the student has completed or nearly completed all of his or her course work. At this time, the student takes the doctoral preliminary examination that is comprehensive in nature.

**Additional Evaluations**

All students are evaluated on an annual basis. If a faculty member becomes concerned about a student's progress at any point in his/her studies (for example, if the student receives a "C" in an important course; if the student receives a poor practicum evaluation), the program committee may choose to perform an additional, unscheduled evaluation to determine whether there is a need to develop a remedial plan (see general requirements section on Quality of Performance). Also, at mid-year (late fall semester/early spring semester) all students in their third year practicum (at the CPSD) are reviewed by the program faculty to assure their readiness for external practicum placement in their fourth year.

**Grievance Procedure**

Please refer to the [Graduate Handbook for Psychology](#) (pp. 11-14) for the complete grievance policy.

**Preliminary Examination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Preliminary Examination cannot be completed until a student has:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Defended his or her thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Completed all master's degree requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Had his/her doctoral continuance approved by the faculty.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The primary purpose of the Preliminary Examination is to allow evaluation of the student for admission to doctoral candidate status. In doing so, the Preliminary Examination should accomplish two main goals:

1. For the student to demonstrate mastery of areas critical for a professional psychologist; and
2. For the student to have an experience that requires that he or she integrate knowledge from different areas.

The Preliminary Examination consists of two parts:

1. case study
2. first-author, empirical paper

These components are discussed in detail below. All phases of the Preliminary Examination must be taken and passed before the student is allowed to apply for internship. Students desiring to complete either portion of the Preliminary Exam must declare their intentions to the Counseling faculty through the Preliminary Examination Coordinator (PEC) by August 1 for a Fall submission, and by February 1 for Spring submission). Outside of these requirements, if both the master’s thesis has been defended and the continuance has been approved, the Case Study and empirical paper can be submitted in any order of the student’s choosing (Fall or Spring Deadlines), although only one can be submitted during each deadline.

### Case Study

The written Case Study is the method by which the faculty makes a comprehensive evaluation of students’ applied counseling skills. This component of the Preliminary Examination involves preparing a case presentation that includes articulating a theoretically-based case conceptualization that considers the patient's social and developmental history, assessment, rationale for the treatment selected, evidence of progress toward treatment goals, and awareness and description of ethical and multicultural issues relevant to treatment. **Students are expected to integrate knowledge across at least two foundational areas in psychology (i.e., biological, affective, cognitive, developmental, and social) and then apply this integration to a clinical case.** This is an independent endeavor that should be completed without input from one's advisor or clinical supervisor(s).

The Case Study must be submitted on either March 15 or September 1. (In the event that March 15 is in the midst of Spring Break, the case study will be due the first day school is in session after the Spring Break has ended, at 9:00 am.) The Case Study will normally be completed in the student’s third year. Students will be permitted to submit a Case Study if:

1. they have completed at least 6 semester hours of practicum credit,
2. they have successfully defended their master’s thesis, and
3. their continuance application has been approved.

Students must consider that normally at least two weeks are needed for faculty members to consider an application for continuance and also that faculty members often require changes to the continuance application. Thus, students should prepare well ahead of time to ensure that enough time exists to meet all requirements prior to taking each portion of the Preliminary Examination. Note also that faculty are not always available in the summer, so students should exert all diligent effort to submit the continuance before the end of the Spring semester.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Required Before the Task Can Be Done</th>
<th>Date Task Must Be Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declare to Take First Component of Prelim Exam</td>
<td>Master's thesis defended Continuance approved At least 6 hours of Practicum credit completed</td>
<td>February 1 or August 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Exam Coordinator (PEC) meets with students to discuss Prelims process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometime early in the fall or spring semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit First Component of Preliminary Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td>9:00am, Sept. 1 or March 15 (or first day school is in session after Spring break if March 15 falls during Break)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading of First Component of Preliminary Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Within three weeks of submission, two reviewers will provide critique; PEC will provide dispensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successfully Remediate First Component of Preliminary Exam</td>
<td>Completed all remediation tasks as directed by the faculty</td>
<td>Within the time limit given by the PEC (usually 2-3 weeks unless major revisions are needed). If the time limit is exceeded (without a formal extension request submitted and approved by the PEC), this is considered a failure of that component of Preliminary Exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Second Portion of Preliminary Exam (Case Study or empirical paper)</td>
<td>First Component (Case Study or empirical paper) of Preliminary Exam Passed</td>
<td>9:00am September 1 or 9:00am, March 15 (or first day school is in session after Spring break if March 15 falls during Break)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading of Second Component of Preliminary Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Within three weeks of submission, two reviewers will provide critique; PEC will provide dispensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Component of Preliminary Exam is Remediated (i.e., Revised and Resubmitted)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Within the time limit given by the PEC (usually 2-3 weeks unless major revisions are needed). If the time limit is exceeded (without a formal extension request submitted and approved by the PEC), this is considered a failure of that component of Preliminary Exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remediation Complete</td>
<td>Within time limit by PEC but no later than October 1 if the person seeks to apply for internship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students Notified Whether Remediation is Successful</td>
<td>Within two weeks of submission of revision but before October 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Must Have Successfully Proposed Their Dissertation</td>
<td>October 1 (Students who have not successfully proposed by October 1 will not be allowed to apply for internship.)</td>
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</table>

Students should use the format presented below for the Case Study. Students are expected to submit the Case Study on time. Unless the student has obtained advance written approval for an extension of the deadline, late submission will be considered to constitute a failure of the Case Study at the discretion of the faculty. **Important Note: Case Study must be successfully passed (i.e., grade of 2.5 or higher) or remediation successfully completed.**

The Case Study is not to exceed 16-18 single-spaced pages, Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1-inch margins or wider. The case study should include 2-3 pages of transcript that is intended to be two or three focused representations of the student’s approach and need not be consecutive minutes of tape. (No more than 4 pages of transcript should be used within the total page limit.) You may include profiles of test results as a brief appendix (again not counted against page limits), but do not include raw data. Citations within the text should support your explanation of theory. References should be in APA format and references will not count against the page limit. Submissions should be anonymous. Please use a code name in your submission.

**Outline for Case Study**

I. Literature Review of Integrative Approach Used
   Outline (briefly, i.e., in 2-4 pages) your theoretical approach to this case (without getting into the specifics of the case yet). Rather, this section should focus on citing the primary sources in this area. **This approach must reflect an integration of knowledge across at least two foundational areas in psychology (i.e., biological, affective, cognitive, developmental, and social).** This integration will be applied to your clinical case in the subsequent sections. It is expected that students will incorporate foundational constructs from these areas into their document. For example, talking about how a theory views the development of a relationship between a therapist and patient is not an appropriate example of integrating developmental psychology into your theoretical approach. However, talking about how a given theory views interpersonal development, particularly its role in the development of symptoms, would be an appropriate example of integration. Of note, this integration must be very clear and detailed in order to receive credit for this portion of Case Study.

II. Identifying Data
   Client demographics, employment status, residence, education, etc.

III. Referral Information
   Presenting problem, initial presentation, referral source, reason for referral, etc.
IV. Assessment Procedures Used (List and include a hard copy of the assessment results along with case submission – appended materials are not counted as part of the page limit)
(Note: Formal testing is encouraged, but it is not required. The student should make an effort to include assessment within the treatment of the client even if the agency does not administer assessment batteries. The student must work with the supervisor to ensure wise selection, interpretation, and reporting of assessments. All cases will involve diagnostic assessment, and all diagnoses must be made using supporting evidence. Using assessment to diagnose and as an aid to treatment can strengthen the student’s readiness for internship, and thus is recommended; however, if no formal testing is given, this will not ipso facto result in failure of the Case Study.)

V. Background Information
Social, developmental, medical, family, cultural, educational and work history, history of presenting complaint, etc.

VI. Results and Interpretation of Assessment Procedures
Report results as you would in an assessment report, including integration of results into a conceptualization of the client’s major problem(s). [In an appendix, which does not count against page limits, please include assessment data—i.e., subscale scores from WAIS, not just WAIS full scale and Performance and Verbal scores. Do not include raw test data (i.e., copies of BDI)].

VII. DSM diagnosis
Another brief description of the problems based in your theoretical perspective. Be sure to justify your diagnosis and explain in detail how you ruled out other potentially plausible diagnoses.

VIII. Treatment Plan
Describe your plan for treating this client, clarifying the theoretical and empirical support for your approach. Include short-term and long-term goals. (This articulation of theory and application to a treatment plan are vital.)

IX. Course of Treatment
A. Frequency of meetings, sequence of events or themes, etc.
B. Major techniques used.
C. Discuss in detail how you managed any ethical issues that arose.
D. Describe any cultural issues relevant to assessment and treatment.
E. Transcript with illustrations of techniques or themes (2-3 pages; max 4 pages).
F. Describe termination process.

X. Evaluation of Client Progress
Strengths and weaknesses of treatment approach used; predictions about long-term outcome for this client.

Grading of Case Study
Grading of case study is as follows: Readers will provide written critiques for improving the Case Study. In addition, graders will use the following scoring system:
a. **Failure.** The student fails case study if a median grade of 1.0 is achieved (i.e., either both reviewers rate the case study as 1.0 or, in the event of a 2.0 and 1.0, the third reader assigns a 1.0, yielding a median of 1.0).

b. **Median grades on the case study.**
   i. Students may earn a grade of 1.0 if both graders score the case study at 1.0, or if (in the case of readers scoring the case study or question as 1.0 and 2.0) a third reader scores the case study as 1.0. It is not possible to earn a 1.5 grade.
   ii. Students may also earn scores of 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5, or 4.0, as determined by the median of the graders.

c. **Pass.** The student passes the case study outright if a median grade of 2.5 or better is achieved and no remediation is required by the graders, or if a grade of 3.0 or higher is earned.

d. **Remediation.** A median grade of 2.0 will require successful remediation to pass the case study. (Regardless of what score a student achieves, the student would be well advised to consider any comments on the case study to better prepare for internship applications and interviews.) For a grade of 2.5, the faculty members reading the case study may, based on their judgment, require remediation or not require it. No remediation is required for grades of 3.0 or above. If a student learns from the Prelim Coordinator that they have been asked to remediate, they must contact the graders within 48 hours of receiving this notification to set up a meeting to discuss the remediation approach, including the graders’ expectations regarding the revisions. This meeting is required (unless graders explicitly state in their feedback that it is not necessary), and is intended to help the student focus on the area(s) of greatest concern in the Case Study, hopefully facilitating the revision process. *Remediation must be submitted within the time limit set by the faculty.* The remediation attempt will be graded as “Successful Remediation” or “Unsuccessful Remediation.” Failure to complete the remediation in the time limit specified by the faculty graders is grounds alone for receiving “Unsuccessful Remediation.”

**Guidelines for First-Author, Research Paper Portion of the Preliminary Exam**

The other component of the Preliminary Examination is to write a first-authored paper suitable for publication without significant input from one’s advisor or other authors. The Research Paper component of the Preliminary Examination specifically requires students to demonstrate competency in research methods and advanced integration of other discipline-specific knowledge domains, including quantitative, psychometrics and social aspects of behavior, at a minimum, although most students integrate other discipline-specific areas as well (e.g., application of social-learning theory models for health behavior change; developmental considerations in health behavior).

**Research Paper Criteria**

1. The paper must be empirical; the paper can include one or more programmatic studies, a meta-analysis, or a qualitative empirical study.
2. It is acceptable if the data for the paper were collected at the same time as thesis data were collected, but it cannot be the thesis article. It must be a new article, though there can be some shared data with the thesis.

3. Data can be from an existing data set, but the study should reflect the first-authorship of the student and not just be an extension of the PI’s work.

4. The study should be relevant to the student’s research career—either continuing programmatic work or starting a new area that the student hopes to build into a program of research.

5. The paper cannot be the student’s thesis.

6. You should submit an Abstract of your Research Paper to your advisor well in advance of collecting the data (or analyzing the data, if they are already collected). Your advisor will review the Abstract to ensure that there are no “fatal flaws” in your design and provide you limited feedback in that regard.

Suggested Page Limits & Format:

1. We suggest you identify a target research outlet for your paper in consultation with your advisor. You may (but are not required to) submit the Instructions for Authors with your Preliminary Paper. Your paper should be the length of a regular research article (not a Brief Report or Short Communication). Please note that many medical journals have much lower word limits (e.g., 3,000 words) for regular length articles than psychology journals. Because your prelims committee will use a psychology lens to evaluate your paper, we recommend that you choose a journal with a more liberal word limit to allow you to include all of the necessary components that would be expected in a psychology paper (e.g., thorough literature review, study rationale, scale description, thorough interpretation of findings, etc.).

2. The Introduction should be ~5-7 pages long. Assume your reader is not completely familiar with the topic, and provide a strong rationale for your study. Your study’s research question and/or hypotheses should be clearly stated at the end of the Introduction.

3. The Method section should include information about your participants and how they were recruited, the measures used (including psychometrics and appropriateness for your specific sample), the procedure, and data analysis plan.

4. Data should be checked to verify they meet the assumptions of all planned analyses, and the analyses selected should be appropriate to address the research questions.

5. The Discussion should remind the reader of the purpose of your study, briefly summarize your results in non-statistical terms, and then place findings into the context of previous literature. Note the strengths and limitations of your study, provide directions for future research in this area, and note clinical implications. Generally, this section should be approximately ~5 pages long.
Submission and Grading of the Research Paper

Submission

Due September 1 or March 15. Applicants may submit papers earlier; however, they will be graded beginning September 1 each year.

Grading

Grading will be completed by two graders (not the student’s advisor). It is generally not possible to have masked review.

Graders will pay particular attention to all aspects of research design (e.g., internal and external validity issues). In addition, they will assess attention to research ethics throughout, and to diversity issues as appropriate. Quality of writing is also an important factor.

Grades of Pass/Fail

Each grader assigns one of the grades as follows:

i. **Reject** (This signifies that the grader believes that the paper should fail prelims because there is (are) a non-correctable flaw(s);)

ii. **Major Revise-and-Resubmit** (Major R&R; This signifies that the project may be redeemable, but will require major revision—up to and including new data collection.)

iii. **Revise and Resubmit with Minor Revisions** (Minor R&R; This signifies that the reader believes the manuscript to be modifiable to an acceptable paper);

iv. **Accept** (This signifies the reader believes the paper is acceptable as submitted or with only cosmetic modifications).

Prelim Coordinator can make a decision to Pass the revision if revisions are minor and are obviously well done; Prelim Coordinator will usually give readers a second look. (Readers vote Pass or Fail—no additional comments; two Fails are required for the student to Fail prelims.) If a student learns from the Prelim Coordinator that they have been asked to remediate, they must contact the graders within 48 hours of receiving this notification to set up a meeting to discuss the remediation approach. This meeting is required (unless graders explicitly state in their feedback that it is not necessary), and is intended to help the student focus on the area(s) of greatest concern in the Research Paper, including the graders’ expectations regarding the revisions, hopefully facilitating the revision process.

Decisions Regarding Passing or Failing the Research Paper part of Prelims

a. At the end of the process, a decision will be made to **Pass prelims** or **Fail prelims**.
   i. If failure occurs, the paper may not be resubmitted. A new project must be submitted the following March 15 or September 1.

b. Failure of the Case Study twice or of the Research Paper twice constitutes dismissal from the doctoral program.
c. For the two primary readers, if one of the two recommends Reject, that will automatically trigger a third reader.
   i. If third reader rates “Reject,” student fails prelims and can retake one time the following semester or summer;
   ii. If third reader rates “Major R&R” or “Minor R&R,” student can revise.

d. An unsuccessful revision fails prelims;
   i. A successful revision passes prelims.

e. Faculty feedback will be like feedback on an article, and is aimed at shaping the article into an acceptable manuscript with a good chance of journal acceptance.

f. \textit{Failure of a portion of the Preliminary Examination}. The student is not considered to have passed the Preliminary Examination until he or she has passed the Case Study and Research Paper portion. If the student fails or does not successfully remediate within the allotted time, then the portion must be re-taken during a following year, assuming this is the first failure.

g. \textit{Failure through unsuccessful remediation or not remediating successfully by the time limit}. If the faculty requires remediation on the Case Study or the student receives “Unsuccessful Remediation,” then failure of the case study is considered to have occurred.

\section*{Passing Preliminary Examination}

1. \textit{Consequences of two failures of any part of the preliminary examination is termination}. If a student fails either section of Prelims twice, then the student will be terminated from the program as having irrevocably failed the preliminary examination.

2. \textit{Passing a portion of the Preliminary Examination}. Once the Case Study or the Research Paper portion has been passed, it does not have to be retaken.

3. \textit{Passing the Preliminary Examination as a Whole}. After both the Case Study and Research Paper portion of the Preliminary Examination have been passed or successfully remediated, the Preliminary Examination is considered to have been passed. The student is then officially a doctoral candidate. \textit{The entire preliminary examination must be passed prior to October 1 before applying to internship.}

\section*{Internship}

Students normally apply for internships in the fall of their final year on campus, and accept internships in February which will begin generally between July 1 and September 1. Internship sites that are members of APPIC (Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers) require formal certification from the program director stating that the student is eligible and ready for internship and has fulfilled all pre-internship program requirements. Students must be certified as "ready" for internship by the program
director before they will be allowed to submit their rank order list of internship sites to the APPIC Match Program.

In order to be certified as "ready" by the program director, students must have successfully completed both parts of the Preliminary Exam and proposed their dissertation by October 1 of the year applications are due for internship.

The program's DCT helps students get through the internship application process, and holds several information sessions for students who are applying each year. Students are expected to keep the DCT and advisor informed about their internship application plans.

The following sections are based on past applicants’ attempt to offer some suggestions and guidelines learned from actually going through internship selection. These sections have been updated to reflect recent changes in the application process. The process can be conveniently divided in three parts:

1. considering internship sites
2. applying for internships
3. interviewing and decision making

## Considering Internship Sites

Students should be considering potential types of internship sites (e.g., counseling center, VA Medical Center, academic medical center, community mental health center), no later than the time they apply to external practicum in their rising fourth year. This is because students generally seek external practicum opportunities that are particularly relevant to their internship and postdoctoral goals, and build upon their training experiences at UCS and CPSD. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss both external practica and internship options with their advisors and clinical supervisors. These efforts can help ensure that the training opportunities sought are an optimal fit with the student’s goals. Students are required to submit (to the DCT) a list of the internships to which they plan to apply prior to submitting their applications.

A convenient way of locating possible internship sites is by consulting the APPIC directory of internship programs. The APPIC Directory is online. Also, do not neglect to gather information about the experiences of students who have already been on internship. A list of sites to which our students have been matched is available here: (2020_counseling_psych_internship_names).

Obtaining an excellent internship spot that is APPIC and APA approved has become very competitive process. Recently, the average number of applications submitted by successful students each year ranges around 15-18. Nonetheless, as you can see from this list, our students do extremely well and obtain some outstanding internships. In the extremely rare case that a student has not matched, it was typically due to applying to either an extremely small number of sites (e.g., ≤ 5), and applying within a very limited geographical area. Students should only consider applying to sites that are a good fit with their prior training experiences and future goals.

## Applying

Most applications are due between October 15th and November 15th. If students delay seeking material from agencies of interest until the fall semester in which they intend to apply, they may find themselves in the position of trying to propose a dissertation, complete/remediate the part of the Preliminary Exam, and
complete numerous internship applications simultaneously. This likely means that the internship application cannot be completed as thoroughly as the student wishes. **Seek materials early; most are now available online.**

1. **Prepare good answers to essay questions.** There is a uniform AAPI, with the same questions each year. These statements are general and do not have to be tailored to the specific site. Students have had significant success working on these over the summer, when pressures from practicum and classes are lower. The DCT is available to provide feedback during this time.

2. **Tailor your letter to the site.** However, you should tailor each cover letter directly to the site. In preparing this letter, be sure to emphasize that you bring to the site excellent training as a Counseling Psychology student-in-training. Part of that is research training. Do not hesitate to mention that training and experience because this is one of the advantages we have as a top-flight PhD program over the PsyD applicants.

Most internship agencies request a formal transcript to be sent from the VCU registrar's office. This may take as long as 9 to 14 days, depending on the efficiency of the registrar's office at that time. It is wise to double check with the registrar's office to make sure that the transcript did get sent. Internship will require you to submit the uniform APPIC Application for Psychology Internship (AAPI). You can begin preparing the AAPI while waiting to decide where you will apply. It would be particularly useful to begin working on the section of the AAPI that requires documentation of practicum experience. Note: all students are expected to record their practicum log hours on a weekly basis as soon as they begin clinical work to avoid becoming overwhelmed by this requirement for the APPI. The AAPI must be submitted to the DCT. As part of the certification process, the DCT provides a letter of endorsement within the application. Most sites will also want a vita from you. The internship agencies generally also request three letters of recommendation. It is wise to contact your reference writers early to allow them sufficient time to write their letters. If you know an agency is looking for a certain type of applicant, it may be necessary for you to discuss with your reference person the necessity of emphasizing certain of your skills, abilities, and experiences. Prior to receiving internship application materials, you also should begin thinking about your training goals and interests as well as your professional strengths and weaknesses. As can be gathered by the above, internship application is time consuming and requires attention to detail. An average of two to four hours per application is probably a realistic estimate.

## Interviewing and Decision Making

Most internship sites require personal interviews. It is only practical, of course, if a student is seriously interested in an agency, that he or she makes every effort to interview personally at that facility; not only does this enhance the possibility of being offered an internship but also allows the student to gain first-hand knowledge of the facility. Most sites require personal interviews. It is wise to start planning for the expenses of interviewing well ahead of time, as plane tickets, new clothes, hotel rooms, etc. can easily decimate a graduate student's budget. Unfortunately, because of time and distance factors, travel to facilities may be impossible. A possible alternative in such cases is a telephone interview. Even though this poses many obvious disadvantages relative to a face-to-face interview, it does allow the candidate to speak directly with the staff person and to allow some of his or her personality to project over the phone.

**Prepare for your interviews.** There are many common questions asked in interviews. The DCT has a list for you to consider as you prepare for interviews. You should arrange with your peers to do practice
interviews in which you answer the questions in a role play. This also allows each of you to listen to each other answer the common questions.

Actual interviewing conditions vary from agency to agency. Students should be prepared for both group and individual interviews, and sometimes multiple individual interviews. Internship interviews are employment interviews. The student should not expect definitive feedback after the interview concerning acceptances or rejection of his or her candidacy.

Internship sites that are members of APPIC are required to abide by the APPIC Match Policies. These policies, as well as the AAPI, the online version of the APPIC directory, and other important information about the application process, are available online at the APPIC website (www.appic.org). Moreover, the program expects students to only apply to and accept APA approved internship sites. Students must seek prior written approval before applying to any unaccredited sites, and cannot rank an unaccredited site without prior written approval of all program faculty.

**General Summary**

The internship application process is lengthy. It is wise for the student to do as much of the work as possible in the late summer and early fall of the application year. It is possible to identify general internship goals, to assess professional strengths and weaknesses, and to begin working on the AAPI while waiting for internship materials to become available. Furthermore, references should be lined up and directions given as to what types of letters would be most helpful. Faculty, students currently on internship and recently alumni, and professional friends can be contacted regarding relative merits of various internship sites. Prior preparation allows for more thorough applications and markedly reduces the anxiety felt while moving through the internship process.
# Suggested Time Table for Completion of theDoctoral Program

## 1st Year
- Get thesis project well underway
- Work in your advisor’s research lab with peers
- Propose by the end of the first year

## Second Year
- Defend thesis, fall or spring semester
- Submit application for continuance in the doctoral program (after thesis defense)
- Collect data for your prelims project (often done in conjunction or just after data collection for thesis; but it cannot be your thesis project)

## Third Year
- Get dissertation project well underway; propose by end of fall
- Submit Case Study or Research Paper portion of Prelims by March 15

## Fourth and Fifth Years
- Submit Case Study or Research Paper portion of Prelims by September 1
- Begin reviewing internship options the summer prior to applying; begin narrowing down site list, working on essays, preparing vita, and identifying writers of letters of recommendation
- Propose dissertation by November 1 (or two weeks prior to the first application deadline)
- Completely pass case study and paper portion of prelims by October 1
- Apply for internship
- Internship interviews usually from December to February 1
- Defend dissertation, spring semester, ideally before ranking internship sites

Students should attempt to propose the dissertation by the late third year or early fourth year and they should defend their dissertation prior to October 1 of their fifth year.
Sixth Year

- Full time internship

See the website for APPI for more information. Do sign up as a student member to keep up with the information you need in preparation for applying to internship.

Appendix A: Continuance Application

Request for Continuation and Approval of Doctoral Program of Studies
Counseling Psychology Program

Student's Name_______________________________ Date___________
Advisor's Name_______________________________

I. Courses completed (note when taken or planned) Semester/Year Grade

Department Core Courses
PSYC 619 Learning and Cognition
PSYC 629 Biological Basis of Behavior
PSYC 675 Ethical Principles of Psychology
PSYC 680 Statistics in Psychological Research I
PSYC 681 Statistics in Psychological Research II

Required counseling courses
PSYC 6XX Research Methods in Psychology
PSYC 611 Contemporary Issues in Couns. Psy
PSYC 616 Psychopathology
PSYC 625 Career Development and Occupational Health
PSYC 643 Principles of Psychological Measurement
PSYC 644 Individual Tests of Intelligence
PSYC 645 Assessment of Personality

Developmental Course
PSYC 603 Developmental Processes

Social Aspects of Behavior Course
PSYC 630 Social Psychology

Counseling Practica
PSYC 693
(6 credits required for master's; 12 required in total)
**Thesis and Dissertation**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Semester/Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSYC 798 Master's thesis (6 credits required)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis title, chair, and date defended</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester/Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSYC 898 Doctoral Dissertation (12 credits required)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Open Electives**

(3-6 credits required)

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

II. Preliminary Examinations

Case Study Planned submission date (semester/year): _________

Research Paper Planned submission date (semester/year): _________

III. Residence

Plan to meet residency requirement of at least one-year (2 consecutive semesters) of full-time residency post master's degree.

Semesters in residence: _________________________________________________________

IV. Doctoral Dissertation

Title or Topic: _________________________________________________________________

Chairperson: ______________________________

Planned Proposal Date (semester/year): _________

Planned Defense Date (semester/year): __________

V. Internship

1. Planned internship year: ___________

2. Type of setting: __________________

VI. Area of Concentration

(Note: At a minimum, an area of concentration is at least one and preferably two courses beyond what is normally required within the Counseling Psychology curriculum plus some research (thesis, dissertation, or other), and some practice (involving specialty practicum, volunteer practice activities, teaching, or consultation)

A. Describe your area and your rationale for choosing this area of concentration.

B. List all of the courses, practica or other supervised counseling experiences, research, and work/learning experiences which form the content of your area of concentration.
VII. Demonstration of Multicultural Awareness, Sensitivity, and Skills
(Note: Please do not merely describe your awareness. Ideally, you will address your awareness and the experiences from which that awareness grew, your multicultural knowledge and skills, and evidence supporting those.)
Appendix B: Process for Applying to an External Practicum as a Rising Third Year

The CPSD Multicultural Clinic is the primary focus of VCU Counseling Psychology students’ third year clinical training experience. A number of training modalities and populations are already possible through this experience, including assessment (see Program Handbook). Nonetheless, in rare cases, after consultation with their advisor and the practicum supervisors at CPSD, a student might wish to accrue additional clinical practicum hours as a third year student. The purpose of this document is to outline procedures and policy for applying for an additional external clinical experience that would occur during a student’s third year, and to outline the parameters of this experience.

The time required to complete CPSD training, in combination with the standard research and academic demands graduate school requires, are significant; hence additional training only will be considered in rare cases. Students with an interest in additional training must make a compelling case justifying the need for this additional training in the third year, despite the already significant training demands all students must manage.

Of note, because rising third year Counseling students have a guaranteed practicum placement at the CPSD, they are only eligible for an external practicum placement after all students in the fourth year and above are already placed in practica. This means rising third year students may consider only placements which still have openings available after all of the more senior students have received their assignments. Information about which sites have openings remaining is available from the DCT. It is recommended that any students considering this option consult with the DCT, their advisor, and the CPSD supervisors in March of the semester in which they are considering applying to review potential placement options.

Any student with interest in a third year external placement must submit a written request to the faculty (via email to their advisor and the Director of Training) by March 25th of their second year clarifying their reasons for pursuing an external opportunity. This email should explain (in approximately one paragraph):

- The specific experiences of interest and how this additional opportunity would add to their training; particular training gaps the experience would fill and why it would be difficult to obtain these via the traditional sequence (UCS, CPSD, External Practicum in 4th year).
- What clinical training (if any) they have already had before coming to VCU that may have prepared them for this proposed additional placement.
- A clear and compelling reason why the student must begin this experience in their third year, as opposed to waiting until their fourth year.
- How the proposed experience fits with plans for internship and / or other professional goals such as the type of internship setting desired, or clinical population of interest, etc.

- Applications must also be accompanied by a current CV.

Only students in good standing (both academically and in their current clinical placement) may apply for this exception. If a student experienced any form of clinical or academic remediation then this must be resolved before any extra external placement will be considered. In addition to formal remediation, any unfavorable feedback from academic or clinical supervisors may prevent a student from receiving approval for this opportunity. Finally, all students applying for this exemption must have successfully defended their thesis prior to submitting their request.
Because CPSD is the primary focus of the third year clinical experience, no student will be allowed to begin any additional clinical work until they complete the CPSD onboarding process. The earliest start date for an additional experience would be the first day of the Fall semester of a student’s third training year. Finally, a firm maximum of 5-8 hours additional training time per week will be permitted at any external site.

Faculty will notify students of the disposition of their request by May 15th. Students may contact potential external supervisors only if and after they have received approval. (The Director of Training can help students discern which sites might have unfilled external practicum slots, and provide contact information). Finally, individual site supervisors have the ultimate decision-making authority regarding whether or not they will accept a given student for training at their site.

If you have any questions about this policy or process, please contact the Director of Training.