

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center



Diversity Statement

Dear Applicants:

A crucial factor for selecting an internship for many applicants is the emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Here are some factors that you might want to consider about Jesse Brown VAMC.

Didactics

We endeavor to provide ample didactics on diversity-related issues. We strive to incorporate diversity and inclusion components into all learning experiences and through diversity readings. Additionally, diversity related issues are frequently addressed in clinical assessment and discussion, as well as in supervision.

Staff Evaluations

Staff evaluations are completed at the end of each rotation. All written feedback that interns provide to staff, for both didactic presentations and supervision, are discussed with staff, and such feedback includes whether the staff member has adequately addressed diversity issues.

Diversity in the VA Chicago Health Care System Patient Population

Some specific diversity/inclusion issues about the Chicago VA patient population that might be of interest to applicants include:

Age

Older patients are well-represented in this population, and interns with an interest in geriatrics can get ample experience. In increasing number of younger patients attend JBVAMC, especially since the war in Iraq, and ages from early 20s on up are represented on intern psychotherapy caseloads, as well as in other training experiences.

Disability Status

While persons who are disabled are not allowed to enter the military, many veterans develop disabilities while serving in the military and/or later in life. In fact, one of the factors that enables a veteran to be eligible for VA care is to be disabled. Thus, experience treating disabled clients is readily available in all VA mental health areas. Some of these disabilities include loss of vision, amputations, problems with hearing, other problems with ambulation, traumatic brain injury, psychiatric and polytrauma.

Educational level

While many of our veteran patients come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have a low or limited educational level, some have also taken advantage of the opportunities offered to them through the military and the VA for higher education. In fact, we often see veterans of all ages who are currently college students. So a variety of educational levels can be seen in the veteran population.

Ethnicity and Race

Interns at Jesse Brown VA serve a predominately African-American population and an increasing Latino population. Caucasian patients are also seen, and individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Our Latino veterans are mostly Puerto Rican and Mexican-American. As Chicago has many white ethnic neighborhoods, interns are likely to see white Americans who strongly identify with being Polish, Irish or other European ethnic groups.

Gender

About 90% of our veteran patients are male, thus male patients predominate in all treatment settings. Since many psychology graduate students have previously worked in clinical settings where female patients predominated, a VA internship is ideal for anyone who would like additional experience with the psychological treatment of male patients. Issues with male veterans frequently include: combat trauma, masculine identity issues,

childhood physical abuse, men's sexuality issues (including sexual dysfunction and safe sex), anger management, relationship and communication issues, addictions, adjusting to chronic illness (including prostate problems, cancer, severe mental illness, diabetes, back problems, and orthopedic problems), chronic pain, adjusting to aging (including developmental issues and cognitive and physical changes), cardiovascular dementia, and vocational issues (including need for job skills training, education and job placement).

About 10% of our veteran patients overall are female. Interns can have one to three female patients on their individual therapy caseloads of four patients. Women's psychotherapy groups are also available as training experiences. Additionally, female patients are seen disproportionately frequently in the Day Hospital Program. Jesse Brown VAMC attracts female veterans from throughout the Chicago area due to the presence of the Women's Health Clinic. Issues frequently seen among our women veterans include: military sexual trauma, childhood trauma, parenting problems, vocational struggles, relationship challenges, identity struggles, adjusting to chronic illness and chronic pain.

National origin

The veteran population is not diverse on this factor. Almost all veterans are U.S. citizens.

Religious background

The veterans seen at Jesse Brown VAMC are predominately Christian. However, a significant minority of the African-American patients are Muslim. Other religious practices of some of our patients include Buddhism and Native American spirituality.

Sexual Orientation

Interns treating females, especially in group therapy, usually have contact with self-identified lesbian patients. With a lessening in stigma toward homosexuality, we have found an increasing number of males who are presenting for care at the VA self-identify as gay.

Socio-economic Status

Most of our veterans are from lower SES groups. In part, this is due to the eligibility criteria for VA services; free health care is provided to most impoverished and disabled veterans. Treatment needs of disadvantaged populations are thus emphasized in supervision.

Spanish-speaking clients

If an intern has fluency, Spanish-speaking clients can be assigned.

Diversity of psychology staff at Jesse Brown VAMC

Many applicants are curious about the diversity of the psychology staff at Jesse Brown VA . We have a large psychology staff, about half women and half men. We have both Ph.D. and Psy.D. psychologists on staff. We have been fortunate enough to hire over 20 new psychologists within the last five years, including five ethnic minorities. Many of the newly hired psychologists are younger professionals. Currently, interns meet and work with ethnically diverse mental health professionals through multidisciplinary teams and didactic presentations. And we remain committed to training all interns to serve the needs of diverse populations, such as our VA Chicago veterans.

I hope that this Diversity Statement has addressed any questions or concerns that you might have about this aspect of psychology training at Jesse Brown VAMC. Please feel free to ask me any remaining questions that you may have during interviews. Thank you for considering our internship program.

Sincerely,

Patricia J. Lim, Psy.D.

Director of Training.