

Reflections on the Internship Application Process in Florida

by Troy Loker, FASP 2010 Student Delegate

Applying for internship can be a stressful process, but by the time graduate students have reached that point in their academic careers, we have certainly learned a thing or two about managing stressful situations. I am currently interning with Pasco County Schools, which means I went through the internship application process last year. Luckily, FASP has played a leading role in helping to standardize the application process across the state of Florida, and that standardization made a huge difference in making this important process more manageable. It is my hope that in reading this article students will be able to learn from my experiences and reflections on the process to feel better prepared when applying and interviewing for internship in 2011. I am therefore primarily writing to students, but district representative and training program faculty may also be interested in learning from my viewpoint.

The FASP standardization process specifies that prospective interns submit their application materials no later than January 31st; however, it is important to be thinking about application process long before the end of January. Some districts set January 31st as their deadline, but one of the districts I applied to had a January 15th deadline. My suggestion is to think about where you want to apply for internship during the Fall semester. A faculty member of your program may help you in obtaining information from the districts of interest, but to be safe, it is probably best to directly contact the districts yourself early in December to inquire about application dates and application materials required. Contact information for every school district in Florida along with information relating to internships have been compiled into a downloadable Internship Guide that can be accessed at the FASP website. Some districts ask for very minimal materials, while other may ask for transcripts (both undergraduate and graduate), sample reports, resume or CV, letters of interest, online or paper application forms, and/or letters of recommendation. I actually sent in some of these materials to districts that did not ask specifically for them because I figured the more information the better (If they did not want to see an unsolicited CV, I do not think it would hurt me, and since I already prepared it for other applications, why not send it in to potentially get them to know me better). Here are a couple tips for each potential component of the application process:

- Transcripts: Check with the district to see if they require official or unofficial transcripts. Official transcripts may cost \$10 to \$20 each and take a few days to deliver, so be prepared to order these early and allot for these extra costs.
- Sample reports: Make sure to de-identify and proofread these. You do not want to demonstrate unethical or inattentive practices prior to even walking in the door.
- CV: While research accomplishments will be important to include, districts are likely more interested in your supervised clinical experiences so highlight these first. Be descriptive about the range of services you provided, specific interventions or assessments with which you have experience, number of hours completed, or anything else relevant to presenting a clear depiction of your experiences and skills.
- Letter of interest: Preparing a generic letter in advance and then tailoring this letter based on the specific districts you are applying seemed like a good strategy for me. I wanted to make sure that districts understood my specific areas of interest as well as how I would be able to benefit or be a good fit for their district.

- Letters of recommendation: Ask for these well in advance and provide ‘friendly reminders’ along the way by asking if there is any additional information you could provide to support them in writing the letter. I think it was helpful to provide them with materials such as my CV and letters of interest in order to help them think of what to write, but also because I could simultaneously ask for their feedback and editorial recommendations on those materials.
- Online or paper application forms: Know that some of these can be very generic and are written more for prospective teachers applying for jobs with the district. On the other hand, some are developed specifically for school psychology interns and inquire about your experiences with various assessments, interventions, consultations, problem-solving, and other relevant school psychology services.

After submitting your application materials, FASP standardization procedures specify that districts conduct interviews with prospective interns no later than February 25th. The earlier you submit your application materials, the better odds you will be called earlier to set up an interview time, so keep that in mind if you know your availability will be very limited. If you did not already look up information about the district when putting together your application materials, it is very important to learn about the school district and psychology department prior to your interview. Preparing specific questions geared towards better understanding district initiatives and how you might be involved with those initiatives can be a great way to demonstrate a high level of interest in the district. It is important to remember that the districts are interviewing for interns, but are also mindful of the potential for you to work within their district following internship. Interestingly, each internship interview that I went on was conducted very differently. One interview felt very formal, where I sat at the head of a conference table with about six individuals who took turns around the table asking a series of about ten questions from an interview protocol. Another interview felt completely opposite, in which after being asked a couple of questions, it was turned over to me to ask them questions. I had been very well prepared to answer questions about my experiences, interests, and skills, and was very surprised at their much less formal and more conversational approach to the interview. My other two interviews fell somewhere in between those extremes. Overall, I think feeling well prepared for the range of possible questions and style of interview can be very helpful, so asking peers and previous interns for insights about their experiences would be valuable. Here are a few sample questions that go beyond the basics (e.g., tell us about yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, your areas of interest):

- What leadership experiences do you have? Describe a time when you faced a challenge as a leader and how you learned from that experience.
- Where do you see the field of school psychology moving in the next five years?
- What experiences do you have with Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention?
- Do you have experience with functional behavior assessments? Describe your experience and what you found out through the process?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- Have you had experience working with a difficult teacher or parent? How did you handle that situation?
- What experience do you have working with parents?

- What questions do you have for us? (Be prepared with a handful of possible questions, because they might have answered a couple by the time they ask for questions)

Finally, district supervisors of psychological services or their designees who follow the FASP standardization procedures will call on March 7th no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and no later than 10:00 a.m. to offer positions to prospective interns. Those who receive a call are then given until 3:30 p.m. on March 7th to notify the districts if they choose to accept or to decline their offers. This is time for prospective interns to weigh out their options, but courteous and professional prospective interns should make sure to call districts with their decisions as they are finalized. This allows districts to know whether or not to make other offers. For full details about the subsequent call days, please review the FASP Recommended Guidelines that are available on the FASP website. While FASP spells out these guidelines so that prospective interns and districts can be on the same page, I found that not all districts choose to fully adhere to these guidelines. Therefore, it is important to clarify what notification procedures will be used during your interviews. It would be great for students if every district followed the FASP standardization procedures, but of course it is up to districts to decide if they will or not adhere to what could be a uniform procedure across the state.

Hopefully, my reflections on the internship application process will offer some insight and help to prospective interns, but I would certainly suggest that prospective interns seek out additional information from their peers, faculty, FASP, NASP, and district contacts. Based on my term serving as Student Delegate on the FASP executive board this past year, I know that FASP is truly dedicated to supporting its student members. I would encourage any students or district representatives to share any questions, concerns, or feedback regarding the internship process in Florida school districts with FASP, so that our organization can continue to meet the needs of its student members.