

Neuropsychology Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

War Related Illness and Injury Study Center

Washington DC VA Medical Center



Ryan Brewster, PhD
Neuropsychology Fellowship Director
Education Director
War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (DC WRIISC)
Washington DC VA Medical Center
50 Irving Street, NW
Washington, DC 20422
(202) 745-8000 x56800

<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/warrelatedillness/training-opportunities/dc/>



Application Due Date: December 31, 2023

Fellowship Year Begins: September 9, 2024

Accreditation Status

The DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Postdoctoral Fellowship Program at the Washington DC VA Medical Center meets Houston Conference guidelines for board certification per ABCN guidelines. It is not currently accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association.

Application and Selection Procedures

Training begins in September 2024. This is a two-year, full-time program with VA benefits, including annual leave, sick leave, educational leave, health insurance, and federal holidays. The current stipend is \$58,866 for Year One and \$62,048 for Year Two. An updated stipend rate is expected in 2024. Our program is designed to provide two full years of postdoctoral training. However, advancement to the second year is contingent on successful completion of first year requirements.

We are recruiting for **one** DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Fellow for the 2024-2026 training period and anticipate interviewing candidates in January 2024. Interviews by video teleconference are preferred. Notifications and final offers will likely be made prior to the APPIC common hold date (CHD). Reciprocal offers will be considered if an applicant is able to demonstrate a verifiable offer from another program.

Eligibility

To be considered, applicants must have completed a doctoral degree in Clinical or Counseling Psychology from an American Psychological Association (APA) or Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) accredited program, or a doctorate in another area of psychology who meet the APA or CPA criteria for re-specialization training in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined Psychology. Applicants must also have completed or be on track to complete an APA-accredited Psychology Pre-Doctoral Internship. Certification of U.S. citizenship and drug screening are required for all VA Postdoctoral Fellows as they are considered temporary employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, VA employment requires that males born after December 31, 1959 must have registered for selective service by age 26. Please review VA eligibility requirements for trainees at <https://www.psychologytraining.va.gov/docs/Trainee-Eligibility.pdf> and <https://www.va.gov/oaa/hpt-eligibility.asp> before applying.

The DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Postdoctoral Fellowship program seeks and values diverse experiences and backgrounds as the building blocks of a rich training environment. Our program emphasizes respect for trainees, Veterans, and staff members representing all forms of diversity, including (but not limited to) race,

ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, Veteran status, and political affiliation. Fellows are entitled to equal treatment in selection decisions and freedom from harassment and unfair treatment.

This program seeks to admit trainees from diverse backgrounds while selecting the most qualified candidates. Individuals from diverse backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply. VA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and the training program follows institutional guidelines in this regard. Successful completion of this program meets postdoctoral supervised practice requirements for licensure by the Washington DC Board of Psychology.

Application Materials

Please submit the following materials in electronic format to Dr. Brewster through the APPA CAS Postdoc Online Application:

1. A cover letter that describes:
 - a. Your background, current professional interests, and training goals
 - b. Specific reasons you are interested in training at the DC WRIISC
 - c. Experience with neuropsychological assessment, diagnosis, and treatment, including settings you have worked in and patient populations you have worked with
 - d. Research experience and aspirations. What questions would you like to try to answer?
 - e. Strengths and weaknesses in clinical and research work
2. Curriculum vitae
3. Three letters of recommendation from faculty members or clinical supervisors who are familiar with your clinical work and research experience. Letters should be submitted directly from recommenders.
4. Graduate transcripts
5. Two recent neuropsychological assessment reports. Please de-identify samples according to HIPAA standards
6. One research work sample (e.g., published article, chapter, or presentation)
7. A letter from your Dissertation Chair or Director of Clinical Training (DCT) specifying the expected date that you will complete requirements necessary to complete your degree (e.g., successfully defend your dissertation and complete your clinical internship). If a Chair or DCT is able to provide a recommendation in this letter, this may be included as one of the three required.

Application materials must be submitted in the APPA CAS portal

(<https://appicpostdoc.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login>) by December 31st, 2023 at 11:59pm EST.

Please contact Ryan Brewster, PhD, DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Fellowship Director, via electronic mail at Ryan.Brewster@va.gov with any questions about the application process.

Training Setting



The DC WRIISC is physically housed within the Washington DC VA Medical Center, a 205-bed hospital that provides care to more than 78,000 Veterans on an outpatient basis. There is a nursing home (the Community Living Center, or CLC) and a Fisher House (20 private residential suites for Veterans and their families for extended stays) relocated on-site. In addition, the medical center has 5 satellite outpatient clinics (CBOCs) located in Charlotte Hall, MD, northeast Washington, DC (the Community Resource and Referral Center, or CRRC), Fort Belvoir, VA, southeast Washington, DC, and Prince George's County, MD.

The DC VAMC is located in the heart of the District of Columbia, approximately 3 miles from the US Capitol, 4 miles from the White House, and in close proximity to a number of other medical centers (e.g., MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital and Children's National Hospital). Washington, DC is a vibrant, diverse city with many charming neighborhoods, exciting cultural opportunities (including the Smithsonian museums, which offer free admission), extensive and excellent dining and nightlife options, a comprehensive public transportation system, sports arenas, beautiful parks, and trails providing access to outdoor recreational activities.

Training Model and Program Philosophy

The WRIISC is a national program that provides a second opinion for Veterans with war-related illnesses and injuries that remain unexplained after examinations by their local VA medical centers. Three WRIISCs, located in Washington, DC, East Orange, NJ, and Palo Alto, CA, were established to address these complex cases. Veterans from the southeastern US and both Veterans and servicemembers nationwide from specific populations of interest (e.g., patients with repeated blast exposure including Explosive Ordinance Disposal technicians) are referred to the DC WRIISC, where they receive comprehensive interdisciplinary evaluations tailored to their medical concerns. Diagnoses are made when possible, and recommendations for management of the Veteran's concerns are given to the Veteran and their referring medical center. The DC WRIISC team includes clinical (e.g., occupational medicine, psychiatry, nutrition, deployment health, neuropsychology, social work, environmental exposure, and health coaching) and research (e.g., neuroscience, exercise physiology, neuroimaging, and cognitive science) staff. Fellows that join our interdisciplinary team (<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/about-us/who-we-are/dc-wriisc.asp>) will directly assist our unique Veteran population.

The DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Fellowship provides clinical, research (approximately 50% of weekly responsibilities), and educational outreach training. Fellows can expect to develop advanced skills in neuropsychological assessment (including teleneuropsychology) and consultation with a medically-complex population. Trainees have access to a repository of cognitive, emotional, sleep, exercise, treatment adherence, and war-related exposure (e.g., blast injury) data, and will be supported in generating a feasible research

project within the time constraints of the fellowship. Fellows are supported in to learning how to interpret, adapt, and incorporate new clinical research findings into everyday clinical practice.

Clinical Overview

Throughout the course of the two-year postdoctoral fellowship, the fellow will be provided with opportunities and training to develop a strong foundation of knowledge and skills pertinent to advanced clinical practice in neuropsychology. Supervision hours per week may vary by number of Veterans seen but will not fall below two regularly scheduled hours. Through a variety of training-related activities, the fellow will learn fundamentals of functional neuroanatomy, neuropathology, and neuropsychological assessment. As a key component of our program, the neuropsychology fellow will develop skills working in an interdisciplinary setting and providing consultation to providers with varied backgrounds. Neuropsychological assessment is often a key component of a DC WRIISC evaluation and the feedback provided by the neuropsychology fellow to the Veteran and their medical team can be critical. Although the fellow's primary clinical assignment is with the DC WRIISC, the fellow will also see clinical cases through the DC VAMC Polytrauma Service. All cases are discussed in supervision. Graduated Levels of Responsibility Forms will be applied to assess and determine the most appropriate level of supervision for clinical tasks.

1. **Clinical Caseload and Supervision: DC WRIISC**

The fellow is expected to see up to four WRIISC comprehensive neuropsychological evaluations per month, supervised primarily by the DC WRIISC Fellowship Director (Dr. Brewster) and occasionally by the DC WRIISC Director (Dr. Reinhard). Trainees present cases at a weekly DC WRIISC Clinical Team interdisciplinary meeting. The fellow will also participate in collaborative screening of DC WRIISC consults with the interdisciplinary team to determine any potential cognitive, emotional, or other concerns that could lead to deferral, modification, or acceptance of each individual consult. Weekly individual supervision will be completed with Drs. Brewster and Levson and additional supervision with other WRIISC clinical or research staff will be provided as needed.

To continue to address the needs of national Veterans referred for comprehensive care despite travel and/or health-related barriers, DC WRIISC offers remote, clinic-to-home assessments including the interview, testing, and feedback components of our evaluations. Fellows will become proficient with both clinic-to-home and clinic-to-clinic telehealth models for providing neuropsychological assessment, alongside traditional in-person practice.

2. **Clinical Caseload and Supervision: DC VAMC Polytrauma Service**

The fellow will have the opportunity to gain experience evaluating and treating Veterans with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and related co-morbidities under the supervision of the Polytrauma Clinic Faculty. Training opportunities may include provision of individual outpatient psychotherapy and participation leading in a social cognition rehabilitation group for Veterans with TBI and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is also the potential to participate in neuropsychological assessments through the Polytrauma Clinic. Caseload in the Polytrauma Clinic will be arranged between Dr. Brewster, Dr. Levson, and the fellow.

Research Overview

The research component of the fellowship is designed to provide advanced training in health care research related to deployment-related illnesses and injuries and emerging threats. Fellows will have the opportunity to enhance their research skills through a variety of educational, mentoring, and training activities. Fellows will be involved in multiple projects relevant to the WRIISC that involve programmatic research, research that informs VA policy, environmental exposure research, neuroimaging research, and other topics. In addition, fellows will develop a mentored research project based on their own interests. Fellows will mentor study coordinators in

research activities, practice presentation skills in research meetings, collaborate with other WRIISC team members on presentations/posters, and assist with protocol and grant application writing. Fellows will receive individualized research supervision and mentoring from Drs. Costanzo, Brewster, and Reinhard.

1. **Ongoing WRIISC Research:**

Fellows will become involved in at least one research project initiated and directed by WRIISC staff. Research may involve analyses with an administrative database, working directly with research participants, evaluating clinical efficacy, efficiency, utilization, or assisting with program development. A variety of neuropsychological assessment, medical symptomatology, treatment adherence, sleep, exercise, EEG, eye-tracking, and war-related exposure data are currently being analyzed and published in an effort to improve healthcare and policies related to the welfare of Veterans with complex medical concerns. DC WRIISC has transitioned many current research projects to a telehealth model, which has allowed for nationwide remote data collection.

2. **Fellow Research Project:**

Fellows will design a mentored research study that can be completed within the term of the fellowship. This may include developing a sub-study based on an existent IRB-approved project or developing an independent study. Drs. Costanzo and Brewster will provide guidance in the development of a research idea, preparation of a research proposal, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the results (i.e., an abstract or manuscript). Mentors will also provide guidance on submission of protocols to the VA IRB and R&D Department.

Educational Activities

1. **Neuropsychology Distance Learning (NDL) Series:** Fellows will participate in a weekly neuropsychology video teleconference meeting with trainees and supervisors from several other neuropsychology training programs including (but not limited to) Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, San Antonio Military Medical Center, Medstar National Rehabilitation Hospital, University of Texas Southwest Medical Center, and VA Maryland Health Care Center. This fellow-led educational activity generally includes one hour of reading discussion and one hour of case presentation per week. Each fellow will also practice skills necessary to prepare for board certification (e.g., mock ABPP-CN fact findings). In addition, fellows will have the option to participate in an optional Fact-Finding and Study Club, focused on sharpening skills necessary to complete both the written and oral portions of the ABPP-CN board exam.
2. **DC WRIISC Journal Club:** Fellows will participate in a periodic meeting with DC WRIISC staff and colleagues from outside departments to present research findings and discuss journal articles covering clinical and research interests of the group (e.g., exposure, health coaching, psychiatry, neuropsychological assessment, neuroimaging, etc.). Fellows will present an article of interest at least twice per year.
3. **WRIISC Monthly Mental Health Meeting:** Fellows can participate in a monthly meeting with Tri-WRIISC colleagues (i.e., personnel from our sister sites in New Jersey and California) to discuss journal articles, clinical practice topics and emerging research on a wide range of mental health areas.
4. **Neuropsychology Service Seminar:** Fellows can participate in a weekly DCVAMC MH Neuropsychology Service seminar. The seminar includes presentations on a variety of neuropsychology-related topics, case conferences, and discussion of journal articles.
5. **Professional Conference Attendance:** Throughout the training year, fellows will have the opportunity to attend professional conferences to present research findings with funding typically covered by the WRIISC

for one conference per year. Following return from a professional conference, the fellow is expected to provide an informal presentation of relevant material to the fellowship faculty.

Additional educational activities are available at/near the DC VAMC campus. Attendance is encouraged, but not required. Activities will include but are not limited to:

- DC VAMC Neurology Grand Rounds
- DC VAMC Pathology Brain Cutting Conference
- MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital Didactics and Journal Club
- TeleECHO Integrative Cognitive Rehabilitation Seminars

Performance Evaluation

Fellows will receive formal, face-to-face feedback on progress being made in the fellowship at three points during each training year. Formal feedback will include written evaluation that includes ratings in professional competency areas including: Assessment, Intervention/Cognitive Rehabilitation, Interdisciplinary Consultation, Multidisciplinary Team Treatment Planning, Professional, Ethical, and Legal Issues, Cultural and Individual Diversity, Supervision and Teaching, and Scholarly Inquiry. Fellows who receive ratings below developmentally-appropriate minimums in each competency area will be given specific feedback and training to improve their skills in these areas. If necessary, remediation plans designed to assist with any difficulty demonstrating development in professional competencies will be created by training faculty and completed by the fellow before the conclusion of the training program. Fellows will have the opportunity to evaluate supervisors during each evaluation period and will rate the training program as a whole, yearly. Feedback from fellows is an integral part of the continued development and improvement of the fellowship. Fellows will also be presented with evaluation procedures, mechanisms to document complaints, their rights and responsibilities related to evaluations, current due process procedures, and methods to express concerns/address grievances related to training or supervision.

Core Training Faculty

Ryan Brewster, Ph.D. – DC WRIISC Neuropsychology Fellowship Director and Education Director

Michelle Costanzo, Ph.D. – DC WRIISC Research Director

Scott Levson, Psy.D. – DC VAMC Polytrauma Psychologist

Matthew Reinhard, Psy.D. – DC WRIISC Director

Depending on trainee research interest, additional training faculty may be selected from key WRIISC personnel (<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/about-us/who-we-are/dc-wriisc.asp>).

Recent Trainees

2020-2022 Fellow:

Maria Valmas, Ph.D., Suffolk University

Internship: St. Cloud VA Healthcare System

2017-2019 Fellow:

Chmaika Mills, Ph.D., Howard University

Internship: Washington, DC VA Medical Center

2016-2018 Fellow:

Carleen Schwimmer, Psy.D., American School of Professional Psychology

Internship: Bay Pines VA Medical Center

2015-2017 Fellows:

Kayleigh Hale, Psy.D., Pepperdine University
Internship: Long Beach VA Medical Center

Lauren Skalina, Ph.D., American University
Internship: VA Maryland Health Care System

2014-2016 Fellow:

Salya Namazi, Ph.D., California School of Professional Psychology at AIC
Internship: Washington DC VA Medical Center

2013-2015 Fellow:

Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Ph.D., Drexel University
Internship: Washington DC VA Medical Center

2012-2014 Fellow:

Courtney Murphy, Ph.D., Palo Alto University
Internship: VA Maryland Health Care System

2011-2013 Fellow:

Amanda Hull, Ph.D., Palo Alto University
Internship: Washington DC VA Medical Center

2010-2012 Fellow:

Alyssa Adams, Ph.D., Marywood University
Internship: Washington DC VA Medical Center

2008-2010 Fellow:

Kelly McCarron, Psy.D., The Wright Institute
Internship: Washington DC VA Medical Center