

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Practicum in Neurodevelopmental Assessment

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is the lead federal agency for research on mental disorders located in Bethesda, Maryland. NIMH funds mental health research across the country and supports more than 2,000 research grants and contracts internationally.

This practicum experience is based in the NIMH Neurodevelopmental and Behavioral Phenotyping Service (NBPS) and focused on providing developmental and behavioral assessments to infants, toddlers, children, and young adults with neurodevelopmental disorders associated with rare genetic conditions (e.g., Williams Syndrome, Phelan-McDermid Syndrome, Smith-Lemli-Opitz Syndrome, Batten Disease, Niemann Pick Disease, as well as a variety of metabolic and mitochondrial disorders) and undiagnosed patients with complex neurodevelopmental profiles. The emphasis of this program is working with clinicians in the NBPS, who work primarily with young children, although older individuals with intellectual disability and significant other impairments are also evaluated through this service. Students working in this track will be provided with training on cognitive, adaptive, language, memory and motor measures, and other measures for behavioral evaluation with this population, including diagnostic assessment tools and interpretation used in diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability. Students with an interest in neurodevelopment may wish to apply to this track. This practicum is coordinated and supervised by licensed clinical psychologists.

Program Objectives

- Students will understand the role of neurodevelopmental assessment in medical conditions.
- Students will gain familiarity with the cognitive and behavioral needs of individuals with rare genetic conditions and complex neurodevelopmental profiles.
- Students will gain experience integrating data from direct neurodevelopmental assessment with data collected from parent/caregiver interviews and prior reports.
- Students will assess a large variety of patients across the age continuum. Evaluations are conducted in both in- and outpatient clinics in a clinical research setting.

Practicum Highlights

- Learning about the role of psychology and developmental neuropsychology in our nation's premier research medical center.
- Gaining many (upwards of 100-150) face to face assessment hours.
- Exposure to many different neuropsychological and neurodevelopmental tests.
- Interacting with multidisciplinary teams (genetics, medicine, psychiatry, nursing, infectious disease, neurology).
- Opportunities to attend Clinical Neuroscience (Neurology/Psychiatry) and other Grand Rounds.
- Opportunity to develop multi-cultural awareness in assessing patients with varied demographic and cultural backgrounds.
- Becoming familiar with rare diseases (an NIH specialty) as well as common diseases (e.g., intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder).
- Learning how to integrate test results with other medical information (e.g., medications, medical diagnoses, brain imaging, labs, etc.).
- Opportunities to assist with writing neurodevelopmental assessment reports.
- Didactics within and across tracks that provide both depth and breadth of training on relevant topics across the age span.

Extern Expectations

- Students are expected to be on site 16 hours per week (2 days: 9-5 pm) for 12 months (this may be flexible).
- Students should expect to participate in 1-2 assessments per week.
- Eligible candidates must be U.S. citizens or have a permanent residence card (green card).
- Eligible candidates must provide proof of malpractice insurance.

Supervision

- Students will receive supervised experience in planning test selection, administering tests, interpreting, writing up, and communicating results of neurodevelopmental evaluations using a broad range of tests and procedures.
- Supervision will be offered in individual and/or group format. The latter can provide the practicum student with the opportunity to examine data and discuss cases seen in clinic.
- Opportunities to attend rounds, seminars for practicum students, and lectures are available.
- Students participate in a monthly joint neuropsychology/neurodevelopment seminar.

Application Process/Timeline

- Doctoral students who are *rising third years or later* in their graduate school careers and have prior assessment experience are encouraged to apply.
- Applications are accepted beginning in December through mid-February
 - Application Deadline is 2/9
- Students should provide the following in their applications:
 - Curriculum Vitae (CV)
 - Letter of interest
 - Transcripts (can be unofficial)
 - One deidentified assessment report
 - One letter of recommendation
- Students should send their application materials to Audrey Thurm, PhD (athurm@mail.nih.gov), NBPS Director, and Ivy Giserman-Kiss, Ph.D., (ivy.giserman-kiss@nih.gov) NBPS Clinical Psychology Practicum Coordinator.
- Please contact Dr. Thurm and Dr. Giserman-Kiss via email if students have any questions.