

Recommendations for Trainee Admission/Selection Processes: 2020/2021 and Beyond

Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC)

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, through its impact on travel worldwide, is affecting trainee admissions and selection processes at all levels of education and training in health service psychology. This document provides recommendations regarding interviews and other admission/selection processes to address potential health-related or finance-related travel restrictions, as well as other potential barriers to students/trainees in their applications for doctoral, internship, and post-doctoral training programs.

The document reflects consensus among CCTC members that moving the admissions interview process for doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral program to fully remote is critical to address both health/safety and equity/inclusion issues. For the 2020/2021 admission cycle, this step is a necessary response to COVID-19. In addition, however, the CCTC recognizes that barriers related to equity and inclusion will not be resolved even when COVID-19 no longer restricts travel. Thus, this document recommends that programs strongly consider continuing the practice of remote interviews beyond the 2020/2021 cycle.

The CCTC recognizes that varying opinions, needs, and constraints will affect individual training programs' decisions regarding admissions and selection processes, and thus offers a set of principles and recommendations to guide program decisions for 2020/2021 and admission/selection cycles thereafter.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Health and safety** should be prioritized when making decisions about in-person versus online/remote interview processes. The health and safety of applicants, as well as program personnel should be taken into account. Under no circumstances should potential "benefits" of in-person interviewing, as deemed by the program, be prioritized over health and safety.
- **Equity and inclusion** should be prioritized when making decisions about in-person versus online/remote interview processes. It is critical that all (potential) applicants have equal opportunity to apply for admission and participate in admission interviews (and other processes) regardless of financial and other potential barriers. Under no circumstances should potential "benefits" of in-person interviewing, as deemed by the program, be prioritized over equity and inclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Online/Remote Interviews.** It is recommended that all admission interview processes for doctoral, internship, and post-doctoral positions be conducted online/remotely for the coming 2020/2021 cycle. This will remove the immediate burden and increase equity/inclusion, not just for applicants, but for existing students/interns/postdocs at programs who often must participate in costly and time-consuming admissions processes (e.g., purchasing meals, housing

applicants, etc.). This recommendation includes all applicants (e.g., local and geographically distant) to maintain fairness for all applicants.

2. **Justification for In-Person Interviews.** Programs choosing to conduct in-person admission interview processes (either initially or in subsequent years) should consider their justification for doing so and evidence of its necessity and fairness. Programs are encouraged to make this justification and evidence transparent to (potential) applicants. A desire for maintenance of the status quo should not be considered sufficient rationale.
3. **Effective Remote Interviews.** Programs should actively consider, with their faculty/personnel, as well as with the support and consultation from relevant training organizations, how to best create an online/remote interview process that meets their needs, as well as those of applicants. For example, programs should consider how to create a process that “replicates” key parts of the admissions process, including (but not limited to) activities such as individual meetings, “lab” meetings, group informational sessions, virtual tours, group interviews, and group “social events”. Note that the remote interview process need not be “fancy” or expensive; programs are encouraged to use readily available methods of connection with applicants, such as live telephone or video conferencing, or brief slide presentations or videos that can be viewed synchronously or asynchronously. Professionally produced materials are not needed and in fact, some trainees have suggested that less formal “homemade” presentations feel more personal and authentic.
4. **Post-Offer Visits.** Programs should consider whether to offer in-person visits to applicants only after admissions offers have been made, assuming virus conditions allow safe travel and visits. Applicants may want to visit, especially if they may be moving to a new location. In doing so, programs should consider issues of equity and inclusion at this time as well, as some students may not be able to afford such visits.
5. **Flexible Scheduling and Accessibility.** When engaging in online/remote interview processes, programs should recognize and accommodate applicant needs for flexibility in scheduling and privacy (at the applicant’s location). For example, applicants may have personal (e.g., living with family and/or children) and/or work-related (e.g., required days/hours) circumstances that restrict their availability. Programs are strongly encouraged to make efforts to accommodate applicant needs.

Programs should also consider accessibility issues when implementing online/remote interview processes. Although use of online/remote interviewing in many circumstances promotes inclusion and reduces barriers, access to reliable internet, data, and accessible technology is not universal. Programs are encouraged to offer reasonable accommodations to offset unanticipated barriers, and to invite applicants to identify potential barriers during the application process so that programs can respond and provide accommodations.

6. **Evaluation of Remote Admission/Selection Processes and Decisions for Future Years.** Many of the barriers to equitable and inclusive admission/selection processes (e.g., financial, scheduling, and accessibility challenges) will not be resolved even when COVID-19 no longer restricts travel. Thus, are encouraged to give very serious consideration to continuing remote interviews beyond the 2020/2021 admission/selection cycle. Programs are encouraged to view the 2020/2021 cycle as a period of pilot testing. After the initial year of online/remote interview processes,

programs are urged to assess the success of the process with regard to accessibility/equity/inclusion for applicants, diversity of resulting admitted students, and the programs' own recruitment goals. Programs can use this information to make decisions about whether and how to adopt or refine their remote interviewing procedures in future years as a way to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their selection process.

7. ***Applicant Costs for 2020/2021 and Thereafter.*** In addition to the financial costs of the interview process, programs must be mindful of other applicant costs and make efforts to minimize such costs, such that the entire process is more affordable for applicants. Considerations include (but are not limited to): (1) access to program information (e.g., advertise programs in ways and on sites that are free for applicants to use); (2) application fees (e.g., provide information with information about application costs, including costs associated with required institution-specific applications costs that may be incurred when using application management services or common application systems); provide applicants with information about fee reductions or waivers should they exist; set fees as low as possible when it is within an organization's control); (3) transcript fees for doctoral program applicants (e.g., do not require official transcripts until an applicant has been admitted; use the unofficial transcript for selection/review purposes); (4) GRE fees for doctoral program applicants (e.g., do not require official GRE reports until an applicant has been admitted; use the unofficial report for selection/review purposes); (5) wardrobe costs (e.g., advise applicants against buying new wardrobe items for interviews or post-acceptance visits; tell all applicants directly to dress "business casual" or "casual").