

Moving from Trainee to Licensed Psychologist in the State of South Carolina:

Tips for avoiding potentially costly mistakes

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As doctoral-level psychology graduates enter the last stage of their formal training before becoming independent practitioners, post-doctoral Fellows often begin to turn attention toward State licensure requirements. Often, Fellows are not sure where to start, and they turn to clinical supervisors for guidance. Unfortunately, navigating the licensure process is not something that is done as frequently as seeing clinical cases, and it is all too easy for supervisors and trainees to overlook some key elements of the licensing process. This can lead to delays in starting the licensure application process, or missed steps that can cost valuable time and money to young, soon-to-be independent providers. However, a quick review of the regulations surrounding the licensure application process yields some important and simple key elements that can save a lot of headache for Fellows and Training Directors alike.

First, as per section 100-1 "Application for License to Practice Psychology" of the State regulations, "The application process consists of: (a) A Preliminary Application for Licensure (the American Association of State Psychology Boards Education and Credentialing Requirements Data Form) which must be approved by the Board prior to continuation with the licensure application process; the Preliminary Application for Licensure must be accompanied by the application fee. The Preliminary Application for Licensure documents graduate course work and training appropriate for licensure..." Thus, the licensure "ball" doesn't even start rolling until the Preliminary Application is submitted and until the Board approves the applicant's training and credentials.

All too often, Fellows begin their post-doctoral training and do not submit the pre-application materials until well after they have settled in to their new position. This may be weeks or months into the Fellowship. However, *since formal credit for the supervised post-doctoral hours do not begin to count until the Preliminary Application AND the supervision contract is completed and is Board-approved*, the Fellow is not given credit for the time he served as a supervised post-doctoral trainee toward his license eligibility. This can result in the need to extend the Fellowship beyond the anticipated one-year time-frame assumed in order to meet the 12-month supervised post-doctoral experience requirement. This can cost both the trainee and the training program time and money as Fellows may have to stay in a trainee-level position longer than the anticipated 12-months (e.g., if the Preliminary Application was not submitted until 3 months into the Fellowship year).

Further, if the Supervisor begins to provide a supervised clinical experience for a trainee without submitting the appropriate documentation to the State, the Supervisor may be in violation of Section 100-8-C-1 which states that "The licensed psychologist must register the following information, and any other information deemed necessary by the Board...(a) The name of the unlicensed person rendering the psychological service; (b) The nature of the psychological services rendered; (c) The qualifying academic training and experience of the unlicensed person; (d) The nature of the continuing supervision provided by the licensed psychologist." The Preliminary Application for licensure addresses each of these elements, and therefore, **timely submission of the Preliminary Application is a convenient way to stay in compliance with this section of the regulations.**

TIP: To avoid this common pitfall, it will behoove applicants to begin the application process, specifically the Preliminary Application, **prior to starting fellowship**, which is often during the end of the internship-training year. This is especially important as it may take several weeks to months for the Pre-application

to be approved and the Formal Application materials (including the supervision contract) to be mailed to the trainee.

TIP: Remember, one's hours do not begin to count until the supervision contract (sent with the Formal Application materials) are approved by the board. The Preliminary Application for licensure can be downloaded from <http://www.llr.state.sc.us/pol/psychology/Forms/Psycapp.pdf>. This application requires the following information that may take up to several weeks to obtain and complete including:

- 1) The completed application
- 2) Two copies of trainee's curriculum vitae
- 3) A \$500 cashier's check
- 4) Terminal transcripts sent directly to the State Licensing board documenting all completed graduate work

TIP: One frequent delay in approval of the Preliminary Application is the difficulty in obtaining transcripts from one's graduate institution, as often the start of fellowship precedes trainees' formal graduation date. Therefore, trainees and supervisors should be vigilant that the request for terminal transcripts be made as soon as feasibly possible.

Once the Preliminary Application is approved by the board, trainees will be mailed the Formal Application materials comprised of the following:

- 1) The Licensing Information Form
- 2) An Application for Licensure
- 3) A Pre-doctoral Supervision Form
- 4) The Board's postdoctoral supervision procedures
- 5) A Supervision Contract
- 6) A supervisor's report form
- 7) 3 professional reference forms

TIP: It will not be possible to complete all of the aforementioned forms prior to the end of fellowship year. Again, it is necessary to complete and mail in the Supervision Contract as soon as possible for trainees' supervised hours to begin counting toward licensure requirements. In addition, it may be useful to contact potential references and former internship training directors to alert them of the necessity to complete relevant materials.

At some point during the post-doctoral year, Fellows usually begin the process of studying for, and taking the Examination for Professional Practice of Psychology (EPPP). In order to initiate the process of sitting for the EPPP, a trainee must contact the State Licensing Board (marlo.thomas-koger@lir.sc.gov). Permission to sit for this exam **must** be granted by the Board. Thus, if a Fellow has not submitted the Preliminary Application in a timely manner, the Board may not yet be in a position with enough information to grant permission for the candidate to sit for the EPPP at a time that is convenient for the applicant. This can also be highly stressful and frustrating.

Upon receipt of all Formal Application materials and receipt of an official report of a passing score on the EPPP, trainees will be scheduled for an oral examination with members of the Board.

TIP: Remember, all of the Formal Application materials will not be completed until *after* a trainee's 12-month supervised experience is completed. Therefore, a trainee may not expect to sit for their oral examination until they have completed at least 12 months of fellowship experience (starting with the approval of the Pre-licensure Application and supervision contract).

The take-home message of this article is really quite simple. Post-doctoral

Fellows and Training Directors alike need to stay on-top of the Licensure Application process, and it all starts with the submission of the Preliminary Application for Licensure and subsequent Supervision Contract. If submission of these materials is handled promptly at the very beginning of the post-doctoral Fellowship year (or even prior to), the rest of the process will tend to run much more smoothly, and you may likely avoid any costly surprises when trainees are ready to take the EPPP or finish their Fellowship year at the end of 12-months.

For additional resources in navigating this often stressful and confusing process please visit the South Carolina Organization for Postgraduate Psychology Training (SCOPPT) website at <http://scoppt.org> and join the online discussion group.