

## **A Message from Dr. Nate von der Embse, Coordinator of Admissions**

Welcome to the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida in Tampa, FL! Thank you for your interest in our program! In the paragraphs below, I would like to introduce you to our program and provide you with some insight into the admissions process. In addition to reading the information below, I encourage you to visit the section of our website that is labeled [Admissions Information](#). You will see it on the grey bar on the middle of our [homepage](#). Please note that we have one admissions deadline each year. **The deadline for admissions is December 1<sup>st</sup>** to begin the program the following Fall semester. However, *early application submission is highly encouraged, and we review applications on a rolling basis*. We generally will extend offers to interview for admission within two weeks after the admission application deadline. I hope the information that follows will help orient you to our training goals and provide helpful assistance with your application. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with questions about the program.

### **Program Highlights:**

- 1) We are nationally recognized as a *Top 3 Program in School Psychology*
- 2) The program (PhD and EdS) is accredited by APA and NASP-approved
- 3) Our faculty generate over \$25 million in funding annually, allowing for student assistantships and research opportunities locally, across the state and nation, and with international partners
- 4) We value and embrace diversity and social justice across our students and faculty.
- 5) 100% of our students are eligible for funding, obtain internships and secure jobs.
- 6) We have ongoing partnerships with the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> biggest school districts in the US, hospitals throughout the region, the Florida Department of Education, the Institute for School Reform, the School Mental Health Collaborative, the Educational Policy Information Center, and several national school psychology associations.

### **Program Overview**

We embrace the scientist-practitioner model of training. This model is used in many School Psychology training programs, although programs may differ in focus and orientation. Our program training philosophy is guided by the problem-solving model and is focused on *prevention and early intervention*. This is guided by our belief in social-ecological theory rather than within child deficits. To promote positive change for a child, you must also work to improve the classroom, school, community, and home. **We train our students to be leaders, advocates, and experts in multi-tiered systems of support and systems change.** Our program is experience-based, and you will be placed in schools beginning in the first few weeks of the semester. You will spend one day in the schools during your first year of training and two days in the schools in your second year of training. Your school-based experiences give you an opportunity to apply what you are learning in your classes to real-life settings. For doctoral students, many of the third and fourth-year placements will be in research centers, clinics, hospitals, or alternative school-type placements and are selected based on individual student career goals.

Our program has a strong focus on social justice, anti-racism, and embracing human diversity in its many forms. Toward those ends, we actively seek students who will add to the diversity of

our student body and the profession of school psychology. Diversity in race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, language, religion, gender, sexual identity, country of origin, etc., among our students, creates a safe and supportive environment that enhances learning for all and allows students to be exposed to the perspectives of others whose life experiences have been different from their own. In addition to actively seeking a diverse student body, we also strive to create learning environments in which collaboration is emphasized over competition and students are supported to achieve their individual goals. Specific training experiences (e.g., cooperative learning, immersion in practicum settings that reflect diverse learners) and many levels of mentoring (i.e., student to student, individual faculty member to student, faculty dyad to student cohort) have been incorporated into the program to promote skills in collaboration and to access support from and build positive relationships with others in the program.

### **Degree Information**

Our program is both APA-accredited and NASP-approved. We offer two degree programs—an Ed.S. and a Ph.D. You may apply to either program with a bachelor’s degree in any field; we suggest (but do not require) the completion of three undergraduate courses in statistics, research methods, and tests and measurement. Related coursework may also “count” for these three content areas. Students earn a master’s degree at the end of their first year of training—**please note, a Master’s degree is NOT required to enter into either program.** The Education Specialist degree, or Ed.S., is conferred to recognize the advanced level of training required for certification.

In terms of the time to degree completion, the Ed.S. typically takes 3 years to complete. That includes 2 years of coursework and a school-year long internship. Ed.S. students also complete a thesis or an Ed.S. project (i.e., typically a program evaluation, case study, or intervention group). Many students complete their Ed.S. internships in the area around Tampa, but it is possible to complete an Ed.S. internship elsewhere with prior faculty approval. The Ph.D. program usually takes 5 years to complete. It includes 3 years of coursework, a year of dissertation work, and a 12-month internship. Many of our Ph.D. students choose to pursue APPIC or APA-accredited internships, which are located throughout the U.S. Other doctoral students may complete local internships in the Tampa Bay area.

If you are not sure if you want to pursue the Ed.S. or the Ph.D., it is helpful to know that the two programs overlap considerably in the first two years of training. On a very rare occasion, there may be a student who initially applies to the Ed.S. program but decides once they are here that they want to pursue the Ph.D. There is considerable overlap in training in the early years of the two programs. If you think you want a doctoral degree eventually, apply directly to the Ph.D. program, as the Ed.S. program is not a “stepping stone” toward a Ph.D. A primary determinant if a change in program is feasible is the availability of funds (e.g., assistantships) and progress towards research competencies (e.g., thesis) necessary for a dissertation. We maintain the same high standards of training for both programs. Ph.D. applicants typically have a strong background in research through experiences as a research assistant in labs, published papers, presented at conferences, or have completed previous graduate coursework. Ed.S applicants may have less research experience but emphasize working with children and in educational settings.

**Successful applicants, regardless of program, clearly communicate a strong alignment to our**

**training model and understand the progressive and systems-change role of a school psychologist.**

**The Student Experience**

Our students typically are supported through assistantships, which provide students with a bi-monthly stipend, tuition waivers, and student health insurance. At this time, **all of our students who have met program milestones are supported by assistantships**, which is very rare in School Psychology training programs across the US. These assistantships are primarily grant-funded, which often means that they are not guaranteed for four years. However, since I have been at USF, we have provided assistantships to all students who want to have one. Most assistantships require students to work with a professor for 20 hours per week to earn the stipend, and most students have an assistantship from the time they begin the program until they go on internship. Please note that the 20-hour assistantship is on top of being a full-time student and the related requirements (practicum placement in schools). Our students are full-time and do not hold outside employment; only full-time students are eligible for assistantships. If you may be interested in a part-time option, please contact the program director, Dr. Evan Dart ([ehd@usf.edu](mailto:ehd@usf.edu)), or myself ([natev@usf.edu](mailto:natev@usf.edu)) to discuss the optimal program course of study.

Our program utilizes the cohort model. Cohorts usually have 12-13 students. You will take all of your classes with your cohort, which will consist of both Ed.S. and Ph.D. students through the second year. In the third year, the Ed.S. students go on internship, and the Ph.D. students take a third year of classes focused on research, therapy, and supervisory skills. One of the benefits of being with a small cohort is that students form a tight-knit support system. We strongly encourage and foster collaboration, rather than competition, among students.

We also have an active and vibrant research climate. Our students regularly present with faculty at conferences and publish manuscripts, as well as often receive funding to attend research conferences. I encourage you to review individual faculty webpages to see the types of research in which our faculty are engaged. ***Please note: you do not need to know exactly which faculty member you would want to work with when you apply to the program.*** Unlike programs that require you to commit to a particular area of research or faculty member when you apply, we encourage students to explore multiple faculty-led research teams during their first year to determine the best fit and personal research focus. I encourage you to indicate which potential faculty members you may be interested in working within your application, primarily to align interviews with faculty during the interview day. However, if you plan to enter the program as an advanced student (i.e., have already completed the Ed.S or equivalent degree), it is important to indicate faculty preference given limited time on campus.

**Admissions Information and Recommendations**

We typically receive about 80-100 applications per year and accept about 10-15% of students who apply to the program. There are many things you can do to enhance your application and chances of admissions success. Here are a few suggestions when applying to the program.

- 1) Do your background research on the field of School Psychology. Many people apply to our program and state that they want to work with children—there are many careers where you can work with children. We want to know specifically (1) ***why you want to***

*study school psychology* and (2) *why you have chosen to apply to our program*. I strongly encourage you to check out the National Association of School Psychologists' website, which you can access at <http://www.nasponline.org/>. Consider meeting with a practicing school psychologist and, even better, shadow a school psychologist. It will be important for you to understand the specifics of what a school psychologist does if you are invited for an interview. It is readily apparent when we read applications that are “generic” and not specific to USF and our training philosophy.

- 2) Carefully select who writes your letters of recommendation. It is highly desirable to have letters from individuals who can speak to your academic potential. Ideally, these individuals have had you in an academic class and can share with us their perceptions of your ability to conceptualize ideas, to express yourself verbally and in writing, and to perform graduate work in general. If you plan to apply to the Ph.D. program, a letter of recommendation should specifically address your research skills, interests, and potential. It is always beneficial to have a letter of recommendation that could speak to your school-based or educational experiences, including work with children.
- 3) Write a very strong *Statement of Goals* that is individualized and specific to our program. This is your opportunity to tell us about yourself. **Indicate clearly, the role of a school psychologist as a systems change agent from a social justice lens.** In 2-3 single-spaced pages, tell us your story and why you are applying to our program. Successful applicants clearly align goals to the systems change and prevention focus of our program while indicating a desire to promote social justice and equity. For Ph.D. applicants, you should communicate your area of research interest, including any faculty with whom you would like to work. You are not committed to these choices, but they can help us to understand your current interests and what you would like to accomplish in graduate school.
- 4) Thoroughly review your vita. Be sure to highlight your experiences working with children, your research experiences, and any honors or awards you have earned. If you have no experience working with children, it would be beneficial for you to gain some experience, either as a volunteer or through paid work. It also is beneficial for you to gain experience working with children from diverse groups, such as children who are ethnically, racially, or linguistically diverse. If you don't have research experience, I recommend that you join a research group in order to gain this experience. These are important aspects of preparation for our program.
- 5) **PLEASE NOTE—THE GRE AND A WRITING SAMPLE ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR ADMISSION.**

We complete reviews of all applications in early December and then select students for interview invitations. In a typical year, we usually interview about 30-40 applicants. Interviews usually take place on Fridays, with a selection of students occurring shortly after interviews are completed. **Please check our website as we schedule our interview days well in advance.** Students then tell us if they would like to accept our offer of admission by April 15th. Once an offer is accepted, we match all new students with a current student mentor, who helps the new student to prepare for the transition to graduate school. You will also be assigned a faculty

mentor once you arrive in the Fall, and then you choose your research mentors for your thesis and your dissertation.

I hope you found the information I have provided here helpful. Please review our website for more information on our program. I also hope you will also take some time to watch the videos that our students made that will help you to understand why they chose to attend USF and the types of activities in which they have been engaged during their training. Thanks for your interest in the School Psychology Program at USF!

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