Forensic Psychology Postdoctoral Fellowship

Augusta University/East Central Regional Hospital

Brochure





Introduction:

The Fellowship in Forensic Psychology is offered through a partnership between East Central Regional Hospital (ECRH) and Augusta University (AU). The fellowship has two full-time positions available each year. The fellowship began in 2012.

ECRH is a state-operated intermediate-security psychiatric hospital, while Augusta University is a large publicly operated medical school. Located in Augusta, Georgia this fellowship program offers a year-long training sequence with a specialization in public sector forensic inpatient (i.e., completed at the hospital) and outpatient (i.e., completed with individuals who are incarcerated or on bond) evaluations. There may also be opportunities to be part of various civil evaluations conducted through Augusta University and private practice. (e.g., fitness for duty, pre-employment for police officers).

Fellows are given an opportunity to evaluate individuals who have been charged with a wide-variety of criminal offenses, including: murder, aggravated assault, rape, and child molestation. The fellowship offers specialized training in conducting competency to proceed to trial, criminal responsibility (insanity), and violence risk evaluations. Fellows who are interested will also have opportunities to conduct competency to stand trial and court-ordered psychological evaluations with juvenile offenders.

Fellows will have opportunities to conduct evaluations with diverse individuals covering major diagnostic categories, including: psychotic disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, substance abuse, malingering, and intellectual disabilities. At the hospital, there are two units that house 71 forensic individuals who are diverse in terms of age, race, and socioeconomic status. Clinical training experiences include conducting comprehensive assessments of competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility (insanity), and violence risk. Fellows will be given the opportunity to testify and to observe expert testimony provided by their supervisors. When a fellow is required to testify, they will be accompanied to court by their supervisor. During the outpatient rotation, fellows will conduct competency to stand trial and criminal responsibility evaluations with adult defendants who are either incarcerated or out on bond. Fellows will also be involved in annual civil commitment reviews, which are designed to provide the Court with an individual's progress over the proceeding year and to make recommendations related to their appropriateness for continued outpatient commitment/conditional release.

Our forensic fellows are provided with extensive psycholegal education. These educational opportunities include supervised forensic clinical experiences, involvement with a multidisciplinary treatment team, weekly seminars in mental health case law/forensic issues, and protected research time. Fellows who wish to be involved in treatment, can work this into their schedules during the inpatient rotations. In these ways, the fellowship embraces the tripartite model of education: clinical excellence, didactic education, and scholarship. Gaining advanced knowledge in forensic psychology requires exposure to a variety of criminal and forensic issues, training in case law, and didactic seminars. Each fellow should finish the year well versed in public sector criminal-forensic evaluations and gain knowledge grounded in

scientific theory as it relates to criminal forensic psychology. Our previous fellows have gone on to obtain outpatient/inpatient forensic evaluator positions in several states, including Georgia, Colorado, Ohio, California, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Additionally, several of our previous fellows are currently Board-Certified in Forensic Psychology.

Clinical Experience

The goal of the clinical portion of the fellowship is to develop skills related to conducting high quality forensic mental health evaluations aimed at assisting the court in reaching appropriate legal decisions.

The fellowship program is designed to provide forensic fellows with exposure to a wide variety of clinical-forensic evaluations of varying complexities (e.g., competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility, violence risk).

Keeping with trends in forensic psychology, there will be an emphasis placed on learning structured methodologies for evaluating psycho-legal constructs. A prime example are developments in competency to stand trial evaluations that involve the use of structured interviews including but not limited to the Evaluation of Competency to Stand-Trial Revised (ECST-R) and the MacArthur Competence Assessment Tool-Criminal Adjudication (MacCAT-CA). Similar advancements have been made in evaluating violence risk with actuarial instruments like the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide-Revised (VRAG-R) and structured professional judgment guides like the Historical, Clinical, Risk 20 (HCR 20 V3). Structured evaluations of malingering are also a key component of the training experience and the fellowship includes training on the Structured Interview of Reported Symptoms-2, Miller Forensic Assessment of Symptoms Test, and the Inventory of Legal Knowledge. In addition to structured methodologies, the forensic fellows will use semi-structured methods to evaluate important psycho-legal questions. The use of semi-structured methods fosters critical thinking and mirrors what most fellows will do in their post-fellowship clinical practice.

***Inpatient Setting*:** ECRH is a Joint Commission Accredited intermediate security state-operated psychiatric hospital serving all the counties in Georgia. There may also be opportunities to evaluate individuals at Central State Hospital, which is located in Milledgeville, Georgia. Central State Hospital is Georgia's only maximum security state-operated psychiatric hospital.

- Each fellow will complete at least one-four month inpatient rotation at ECRH under the supervision of Dr. Tabernik and Dr. Fritts. At ECRH the fellow will conduct evaluations of competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility, and violence risk.
- Each fellow will be a member of several multidisciplinary treatment teams that meets biweekly to evaluate treatment needs of individuals housed on each of the two forensic units. Being a part of different multidisciplinary teams gives each fellow an opportunity to hone their interpersonal skills in order to work effectively with various professionals, all of whom have different roles on the team.
- The inpatient forensic system is designed to provide the individuals we serve with an opportunity to gradually transition back to the community. Towards that end, ECRH is made up of the Forensic I Unit, and the Forensic II Unit. The Forensic I Unit houses approximately 44 male individuals who are received directly from jail and are often acutely symptomatic/treatment noncompliant. Drs. Tabernik and Groth head the two treatment teams on the Forensic I Unit. The Forensic II Unit is a co-ed unit, which houses

approximately 21 male individuals and 5 female individuals. In order to transition from Forensic I to Forensic II, the individual must be treatment compliant and free from aggression for at least six months. Dr. Fritts heads the treatment team on the Forensic II Unit.

- Opportunities to complete psychological and neuropsychological testing for diagnostic clarification and to assist in placement decisions will also be available to fellows during the inpatient experience.
- While the focus of the fellowship year is assessment, fellows who are interested in conducting group and/or individual treatment will be provided with opportunities to do so as time allows. Treatment opportunities include competency restoration, DBT skills training, sex offender treatment, and motivational interviewing.

Outpatient Settings: Defendants are housed in county jails/state prisons throughout our 48 county catchment area. Other defendants may be on bond and will present to the Outpatient Evaluation Center, located on the campus of ECRH, for their evaluation.

- Each fellow will complete at least one-four month outpatient rotation under the supervision of Dr. Ross, Dr. Tabernik, and/or Dr. Fritts. The fellow will conduct pretrial evaluations of competency to stand trial and criminal responsibility with adult and/or juvenile defendants.
- In cases where a defendant is found not competent to proceed to trial and ordered to complete outpatient competency restoration, the fellow will have the opportunity to evaluate the same defendant after a period of outpatient competency restoration. This process allows the fellow an opportunity to observe the same defendant over an extended period of time, in different environments/contexts.
- There are also opportunities to conduct clinical forensic evaluations with adolescents, some who have been waived into adult court. These evaluations will primarily revolve around competency to stand trial and include significant psychological testing.
- Fellows will be provided with opportunities to conduct annual civil commitment evaluations, which are used by the Court to determine if an individual who was conditionally released or outpatient committed can be transitioned to a less restrictive environment and/or released from their conditions all together.
- Faculty in the Department of Psychiatry at Augusta University are often involved in various civil forensic evaluations. As available, fellows will have the opportunity to assist in civil litigation pertaining to mental health issues.

Flex Rotation:

- Each fellow will complete a flex rotation during which he/she can choose to complete another Inpatient rotation, another Outpatient rotation, or a combination of the two.
- This rotation will be tailored to the future goals of each fellow.
- This rotation will be supervised by Dr. Tabernik or Dr. Fritts and is highly flexible.

Research Experience

10% of the fellow's time *can be* devoted to the development and implementation of an empirically-based research project.

The goals of the research project are to develop critical thinking skills, present the research at a conference, and/or submit a paper for publication.

The fellow can elect to conduct an independent research project, or the fellow could join a pre-existing research project.

The forensic service at ECRH maintains an extensive archival database, which can be utilized for research projects. All research must be approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Didactics & Seminars

The third component of the fellowship consists of five hours of weekly didactic training. These trainings occur primarily on Wednesdays. The training involves case law seminar and forensic psychology/psychiatry seminar. In addition, the fellows attend a weekly Supervision Seminar, during which they will receive group supervision related to their current case load and other professional issues. These experiences are designed to deepen the educational experience throughout the fellowship year. The following describes the seminar schedule.

Case Law Seminar is a 90-minute weekly seminar led by Dr. Holly Tabernik. This seminar provides in-depth discussions of landmark legal cases and includes cases recommended by the credentialing boards of both forensic psychology (ABPP) and psychiatry (AAPL). This seminar will go over each landmark case and the fellow will be asked to present a brief on two cases each week. Fellows are expected to take an active role in the teaching of the landmark case seminar. This is an opportunity for fellows to learn how to read and understand case law, and to sharpen their presentation skills.

Forensic Psychology/Psychiatry Seminar is a 90-minute weekly seminar led by the primary fellowship faculty and select professionals from the community designed to teach the fellow various aspects of forensic evaluation and treatment, forensic report writing, and professional responsibility and ethics. The primary textbook for this seminar is: *Psychological Evaluations for the Courts-Fourth Edition* (Melton et al., 2018). The fellows will be given a list of readings and are required to complete the assigned readings prior to the didactic.

Supervision Seminar occurs on a weekly basis and is led by Dr. Holly Tabernik. This seminar is the mechanism for the provision of formal supervision for both fellows. During formal supervision sessions, fellows will not only have an opportunity to discuss their current case load, but they will also be given an opportunity to discuss a variety of professional issues as they arise during the fellowship year. In addition to group supervision, formal supervision occurs on every forensic case. Forensic fellows work closely with faculty to develop comprehensive, well-reasoned forensic reports. As part of this process, fellows will work with their supervisor regarding psychological testing, clinical diagnoses, and opinions related to the referral question(s).

Additional didactic trainings:

Grand Rounds. Through the collaboration with Augusta University fellows can attend Grand Rounds presentations several times a month. Grand rounds are hour long presentations covering a variety of topics within the fields of psychiatry, general medicine, and psychology. Presenters include faculty from Augusta University as well as experts from all over the United States. Although these are not many forensic topics, the fellows may find many of the presentations interesting and relevant to their forensic practice.

Mock Trials. Fellows will participate in a mock trial experience with attorneys from the local Public Defender's Office. Fellows may also have an opportunity to participate in a mock trial

experience with fellows at the South Carolina Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

DHBDD Annual Forensic Conference. Each year the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities puts on a three-day forensic conference with experts from around the United States and Canada. Over the last several years topics have included risk assessment, malingering, the insanity defense, critical thinking in forensic evaluations, case formulation using the HCR-2O V^3, substance-induced psychosis, diversity in forensic psychology, and competency to stand trial. The fellow will be provided funding to attend this three-day event.

Location

Augusta, the second-largest city in Georgia, is located on the southern bank of the Savannah River midway between the Great Smokey Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. It is a growing and thriving city with a metropolitan- area population of around 400,000, and recently ranked the second most favorable place to live in Georgia. The area is known for its balmy climate, with an annual mean temperature of 64 degrees.

Founded in 1736 by General James E. Oglethorpe, Augusta is Georgia's second-oldest city. Oglethorpe named the city for Princess Augusta, wife of the Prince of Wales. Augusta was Georgia's capital in 1778 and from 1785 to 1795.

The city offers a wide array of cultural and recreational activities. Downtown Augusta hosts events including First Friday cultural celebrations, the Westabou Festival and Arts in the Heart of Augusta. Attractions that promise both fun and enlightenment include the Morris Museum of Art, the Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art, the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History, the Augusta Cotton Exchange Welcome Center and Museum, the Augusta Convention Center and the Augusta Museum of History.

Augusta has many associations dedicated to the performing and visual arts, including the Fort Gordon Dinner Theater; Augusta Opera Association, the only resident opera company in Georgia; the Augusta Ballet, an Honor Company nationally known for its high-quality performances; the Augusta Players, bringing first-rate plays to Augusta; The Augusta Children's Theatre; The Augusta Symphony; and the Augusta Art Association.

The city of Augusta offers affordable urban and suburban living options. Past fellows have lived in downtown Augusta, Evans, and Grovetown, all of which are within a 20 to 30 minute drive from East Central Regional Hospital. Augusta is home to a wide variety of restaurants. Faculty and fellow favorites include: Metro Diner, Laziza Mediterranean Grill, Fat Man's Mill Cafe, Oliviana Bar Italiano and Pizzeria, Manuel's Bread Cafe, and Bee's Knees. Although Augusta does not have professional sports teams, it is only a two hour drive to Atlanta and located in the heard of SEC/ACC territory. North Augusta, South Carolina (which is located less than 5 minutes from the center of downtown Augusta) is also home to the Augusta GreenJackets, which is a minor league baseball team affiliated with the San Francisco Giants.

Compensation

The selected fellows for the 2027-2028 training year will receive the following compensation and benefits: a salary of $63,000 and $1,500 travel allowance; ten vacation hours and eight sick leave hours are accrued each month. Each fellow will also have ten paid holidays. Travel allowance can be used to attend/present at conferences; it can also be used to purchase books, register for the EPPP, and/or purchase EPPP study materials.

In addition, the fellow will have the opportunity to enroll in Augusta University retirement, health, vision, and dental insurance plans. The two fellows will share an office in the same building as the fellowship faculty. Each fellow will have their own computer and access to Augusta University libraries and databases to obtain articles and conduct research. Statistical programs are also available.

Application Requirements

- Applicants must have a conferred PhD/PsyD at the time the fellowship begins.

- Preference will be given to individuals from APA accredited psychology programs who completed an APA accredited internship.

- Please send the following to Holly Tabernik, Ph.D. at **htabernik@augusta.edu** by January 4, 2027.

    1. Curriculum Vitae
    2. Arrange to have three letters of recommendation sent to Holly Tabernik, Ph.D. (can be e-mailed directly to her from your letter writers or mailed to her attention at 3405 Mike Padgett Hwy. Building 10 Augusta, GA 30906).
    3. A statement of purpose (1-2 pages), which includes information related to your experiences with forensic psychology, goals for the fellowship year, and your career goals.
    4. One deidentified clinical assessment/forensic evaluation.

If you have any questions please contact Dr. Holly Tabernik at 706-792-7141 or via e-mail at **htabernik@augusta.edu . The mailing address is 3405 Mike Padgett Hwy., Building 10, Augusta, Georgia, 30906.

The Fellowship program at Augusta University/East Central Regional Hospital is participating in the Common Hold Date (CHD) for forensic psychology fellowships. Although our fellowship will make offers prior to the CHD, we will not require applicants to accept an offer prior to the CHD (February 16, 2027).

Forensic Psychology Fellowship Faculty

Each psychology faculty associated with the training has completed a formal postdoctoral fellowship in forensic psychology or received advanced legal education.

Fellowship Director:

Holly E. Tabernik, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Health Behavior
Psychologist. East Central Regional Hospital
Education: MS in Clinical Psychology from Cleveland State University Cleveland, OH. PhD in Clinical Psychology with a forensic emphasis from Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.
Internship: Fulton State Hospital in Fulton, MO.
Postdoctoral Fellowship: Forensic Psychology at Augusta University/East Central Regional Hospital, Augusta, GA.
Research and Clinical Interests: Malingering, forensic issues associated with borderline personality disorder, dialectical behavioral therapy, violence risk assessment, and assessment of competency to proceed to trial.

Primary Supervisors:

Jessica Fritts, Psy.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Health Behavior
Psychologist, East Central Regional Hospital
Education: MEd in Human Development Counseling, Vanderbilt University and Psy.D in Clinical Psychology, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
Internship: Central Regional Hospital, Butner, North Carolina
Postdoctoral Fellowship: Serious and Persistent Mental Illness and Forensic Psychology, Augusta University and East Central Regional Hospital, Augusta, GA.
Research and Clinical Interests: Women-specific issues in forensic populations, malingering testing, and violence risk evaluations

Valerie J. Ross, Ph.D.
Outpatient Psychologist, East Central Regional Hospital
Education: MS and PhD in Clinical Psychology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL.
Internship: Missouri Health Sciences Consortium Columbia, MO.
Postdoctoral Fellowship: Clinical and Forensic Psychology, Emory University in Atlanta, GA.
Clinical Interests: Criminal forensic evaluations

Megan Porter Staats, Psy.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Health Behavior
Clinical Psychologist/Inpatient Unit Psychologist, East Central Regional Hospital
Education: Psy.D from the University of Indianapolis
Internship: Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University/Charlie Norwood VAMC, Augusta, GA
Postdoctoral Fellowship: Clinical and Forensic Psychology Evaluations, East Central Regional Hospital through Augusta University
Clinical Interests: predictors of competency restoration, domestic homicide risk factors, and limitations of neuroimaging as it relates to psychopathy

Evaluation of the Fellow

During the first week of the fellowship year, each fellow will complete a Learning Contract. The Learning Contract is designed to ensure that each fellow sets and accomplishes his/her professional goals for the fellowship year.

Each fellow will receive a written evaluation regarding his/her performance and progress towards his/her individualized goals two times a year. These evaluations will be provided to the fellow midyear and at the end of the fellowship year. Likewise, fellows will have the opportunity to provide feedback about the fellowship program and discuss with the supervisors what they would like to see improved. We view the fellowship as a collaborative process between the supervisors and the fellow, with the goal to produce highly competent clinicians and researchers prepared to conduct criminal forensic evaluations and advance policy regarding forensic issues. The fellowship is designed to provide 2,000 hours of clinical experiences, which will fulfill most states' requirements for a psychology license. The Fellowship was recently renewed for the ABPP experience waiver.