

STAFF PSYCHOLOGIST AND COORDINATOR OF NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING SERVICES

Chris Truong, PsyD, MHS

Please describe the area of psychology you practice. For example, what does your day-to-day schedule look like?

I am a licensed Staff Psychologist, and I work at a college counseling center that provides free therapy services to undergraduate and graduate students at a large public university. In addition to this role, I also am the center's Coordinator of Neurodiversity-Affirming Services and am responsible for designing neurodiversity-focused psychoeducation and programming. The center is open Monday-Friday from 8am to 5pm, and every day of my job is a little bit different due to the opportunity to provide both clinical care and conduct outreach on campus.

The clinical model at my site is unique in that it provides same day, free walk-in services to students seeking support as well as offers traditional short-term therapy and group therapy. Each day I have around four "same day" appointments that are 30-minutes each and I then I have a mix of 45-min short term therapy appointments or 1 hour therapy groups. In between clinical time, I also provide supervision to externs and interns, attend staff meetings, and finish session notes.

For my coordinated area, I lead a peer education group that meets weekly for 1 hour and we work together to plan community spaces and events dedicated to fostering connection, promoting neurodiversity acceptance, and share resources to help with self-understanding and growth. Beyond this, I also provide workshops and consultation to campus partners looking to integrate neurodiversity-affirming practices into their initiatives and projects.

Were there specific factors that led you to choose this area of psychology? Was there a critical moment that changed your career trajectory?

I originally have a background in public mental health and mental health services research. Much of my work was dedicated to community-based interventions focused on improving access and quality of mental health care to marginalized populations. While the work was interesting and important, I found myself slowly gravitating towards the aspects of the job that centered on relationship building, hearing people's stories, and providing more person-centered support. This realization led me to pursue a career in clinical psychology so I could gain the clinical skills needed to work more directly with people and provide the type of support that I felt most aligned with.

While it was very challenging shift to start a whole new career path, I learned that my past experiences and knowledge was a natural fit for clinical work. I leaned into the spirit of my public health background, reflected upon what type of clinician I wanted to be, and decided that I wanted to focus on the power of early intervention and community. I trained at a pediatric hospital with a focus on neurodevelopmental disorders, a community mental health clinic, and college counseling centers. From all these experiences, I grew to love working with emerging adults and the neurodivergent community. Working a university counseling center was an excellent match for this— a setting that provides services to young adults who are undergoing some of the biggest transitions of their lives, learning how to adapt and cope with the rigorous demands of college, and working to better understand themselves as they move toward independence and adulthood. It also offered a schedule that had a built-in variety of projects and the opportunity to integrate my past work with my present to build a better future.



What advice would you give to an ECP who wants to pursue a position or additional training opportunities in this area of psychology?

Oftentimes the path towards one's goals is not as direct or clear cut as one would like. While the journey may feel daunting, the whole point is to learn from the twists and turns, adapt, and gain insight about yourself. Feel empowered to ask questions, try something that you may not normally do, and plant seeds to build new relationships. Find your people and steadily form a pod of values-aligned peers, colleagues, and community partners to collaborate with, generate exciting ideas, support each other, and celebrate one another.

My current coordinatorship was the first of its kind at my site to be dedicated to the neurodivergent community. I fully believed in the importance of the work, found supervisors who supported me, and took a risk by asking to create a role from scratch. While there have been challenges to navigate and unexpected hurdles, I have still managed to find a way through with the help of my pod and continue to find this work to be fulfilling. If there are opportunities for additional learning and training connected to your interests, take them. If you are considering the possibility of submitting a proposal for something new, try it. If you are deliberating if you should reach out to someone in the field to learn from them, do it. Some of my biggest opportunities came from the most unexpected places and people. While our doubts and worry may feel loud and heavy, the true outcome may surprise you and propel you on a path that you never imagined taking.

Contact Us: earlycareer@apa.org

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