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# INTRODUCTION

## *On Becoming a Neuropsychologist*

CADY BLOCK

We each have our own journey to becoming a neuropsychologist. For some of us, the road is clear and straight. For others, the road is winding and with many detours. Though my own journey in many ways fell squarely under the latter, I still recall it fondly. It actually began in experimental psychology, specifically in the realm of human factors research. Then, I discovered that one could blend the empirical study of the human brain with clinical practice—and I was *hooked*. But at that time I had no clue about the Houston Conference Guidelines or various neuropsychological organizations. I also didn't know much about what it took to be a competitive applicant for graduate school or what it took to be a successful and productive student. I felt a little lost and not quite sure what to do next. It was around this time that I encountered the first of several pivotal individuals in my professional journey.

Dr. Scott Sautter was a local neuropsychologist in my hometown, and he was kind enough to provide me with the mentorship and support needed to get started. When I didn't make it into graduate school the first time I applied out of my undergraduate program, he wouldn't let me feel deterred; instead, he offered me a job as a psychometrist. I accepted it gladly. That

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*The Neuropsychologist's Roadmap: A Training and Career Guide*, C. Block (Editor)  
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summer, I attended my very first American Psychological Association (APA) convention in San Francisco with the brilliant and talented Melissa Pence (another mentor of mine). One of the talks I attended was a panel discussion that outlined all of the various steps involved to becoming a neuropsychologist. I'll never forget watching the first speaker at the podium, then-chair of the Association of Neuropsychology Students in Training (ANST) Zoe Proctor-Weber. She was poised, articulate, confident. She spoke with such passion for service in the profession. I nudged the friend next to me, and said, "One day, I want to be like her." Little did I know the true prescience of those words.

Several years later (and with some more experience under my belt), I was a graduate student in the medical-clinical psychology doctoral program at the University of Alabama-Birmingham (UAB). It was then that I met another pivotal individual in my professional journey, a fellow graduate student and good friend of mine, Jacquelynn Copeland. For all of the work that I do in neuropsychology governance, I credit her for opening that door. I have a favorite memory of her coming to class one day, excitedly holding in hand the application paperwork to start our own ANST chapter at UAB. I readily agreed. I was always astounded by her boundless energy as we worked to grow our chapter.

Were it not for Jacquie, I might never have met Erica Kalkut. She was the new chair of ANST and had placed a call for applications for the national officer committee. I initially dismissed the email, assuming that the opportunity would go to better and more capable individuals. But then I found myself reading the email again and again. For several days my internal dialogue wavered back and forth. I think I was trying to convince myself that I was qualified enough to submit an application. In a moment of pluck, my finger struck the "send" button. Not only was I accepted onto the committee, when Erica's term was over she offered the chair position to me. I knew I had big shoes to fill. This initial involvement within ANST has since catapulted me to other opportunities within the Society for Clinical Neuropsychology (SCN), National Academy of Neuropsychology (NAN), American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology (AACN), International Neuropsychological Society (INS), and Clinical Neuropsychology Synarchy (CNS). Through my educational and professional experiences, I've learned much about the journey to becoming a neuropsychologist. I also discovered a passion for helping others navigate their own path. In a way, this is where the story of *The Neuropsychologist's Roadmap* begins. Its pages are filled with the wisdom of mentors, colleagues, and friends. I hope that you find it an invaluable guide to your own journey. I do caution you, dear reader: Even

though this text is neatly organized into a series of discrete steps, in real life things may look a little messier. At times, you may even wonder if you took a wrong turn somewhere. This is okay. We all ultimately have own journey to make, and collectively they enrich our field. For what is a roadmap but a collection of different paths?



In the decade since graduate school, I have been fortunate to serve the profession in various capacities including roles across organizations like the Society for Clinical Neuropsychology, International Neuropsychological Society, National Academy of Neuropsychology, and the American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology. One particularly critical exposure during my work within these organizations was the concept of professional competencies. Since 2002, there has been a competency movement within clinical psychology—and neuropsychology has recently begun to adopt and refine this approach (thanks to excellent neuropsychologists like Brad Roper, Celiene Rey-Casserly, and Russell Bauer). But what are competencies, exactly? Broadly speaking, *foundational competencies* refer to the knowledge, attitudes, and values required of all entry-level neuropsychologists. In contrast, *functional competencies* refer to the activities of actual practice of entry-level neuropsychologists. More clearly stated, these competencies represent developmentally acquired knowledge and applied skills—gained over the course of education and training—that you (the trainee) should seek to achieve by the time you begin your first professional job.

The idea of the *Roadmap* began years ago, as a solely stage-specific text that would cover the developmental steps required for entry into graduate school, internship, postdoctoral fellowship, and first job. However, being exposed to neuropsychology competencies helped to foster a different sort of conceptualization for this text. It seemed important that student and trainee (and prospective student/trainee) readers not only get a sense of the overall journey from graduate school to first job, but also a more detailed understanding of the diversity of knowledge and skills that should be acquired and mastered along the way.

Consequently, the *Roadmap* began to take a very different shape compared with its original form. The organization of this text diverged into two separate but interrelated sections. The first represents an overview of the timeline for neuropsychology training and career entry. Chapters 1 through 3 offer detailed, practical advice on applying to graduate school, internship, and fellowship. The authors of these chapters represent not only some of the best supervisors and training directors in the country, but also trainees

themselves, who provide valuable insight and information based on their own experience. Chapter 4 helps to bridge the gap between fellowship and board certification on a topic that I find is covered less frequently in advice provided by mentors: professional licensure and credentialing. This chapter was primarily authored by a neuropsychologist with personal experience serving on a state psychology board, who provides accurate and helpful advice in this area.

No text on the neuropsychology training and education journey would be completed without some inclusion of board certification. Chapter 5 serves as an excellent review of the process of applying for board certification, as well as going through the examination steps involved in this process. This chapter is authored by several neuropsychologists, among them a former member of the board of directors of one board-certifying body within neuropsychology, the American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology (ABCN). Other board-certifying bodies include the American Board of Professional Neuropsychology (ABN) and the American Board of Pediatric Neuropsychology (ABPdN). The issue of board certification can be a contentious one, and the fact that this text was only able to review one such option was an editorial decision based on limitations of space and not any intent to exclude other potential boards; indeed, I know and hold in high regard a number of excellent neuropsychologists who are boarded through ABN and ABPdN. I highly encourage student and trainee readers to do their own research, reviewing and considering all potential options to arrive at the best fit for themselves.

For students and trainees, Chapters 6 and 7 represent the end goal: getting that first job. But where does one end up: A clinical position? A research position? One that is a blend of the two? Not all clinical neuropsychologists are, in fact, clinical; rather, a number of neuropsychologists serve as research faculty in graduate institutions or academic medical centers, or as advisors to private industry or governmental entities such as the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Rather than restricting this topic to one chapter, it felt necessary to allow sufficient space to cover the breadth and depth of career options across governmental, private practice, and academic medical clinical positions, as well as between academic medical and academic psychology department research positions. The authors of these respective chapters are well-regarded neuropsychologists with extensive experience serving in clinical and/or research sectors.

The second section of the *Roadmap* opens up with a chapter that sets the tone for the rest of the text. Brad Roper, one of the original drivers of the competency movement in neuropsychology, leads the way on this chapter,

reviewing the history behind neuropsychology competencies with which all students and trainees should be familiar, as well as important definitions and associated initiatives. This chapter is a critical one, as it provides important context for the chapters that follow.

Each of the *Roadmap*'s subsequent chapters breaks down a specific competency domain, providing strategies, steps, and/or tips for readers to follow. Chapters 9 through 11 review clinical competencies related to teaching and supervision, evidence-based practice, assessment, and intervention. Chapters 12 and 13 review basic knowledge and skills critical to research, such as cultivating a research idea and funding your research, as well as how to write up and present your research. To close out the text, Chapters 14 through 20 cover a range of topics important to one's professional identity. This includes ethical and legal standards, cultural competency, working within integrated care teams, cultivating self-care and work-life integration, seeking mentorship, leadership development, and professional advocacy. These chapters are all authored by well-regarded leaders in our field, who populate the *Roadmap*'s pages with their own personal wisdom, advice, and -isms.

The field of neuropsychology is ever-evolving. The *Roadmap* represents a cross section of the field, reviewing training steps, issues, and competencies pertinent at this point in time. However, these are likely to change as the field continues to grow. It is also by no means wholly comprehensive, as the development of a neuropsychologist doesn't simply cease upon entry into the first job; rather, there is continued learning, advancement, and refinement through the early career and midcareer periods—and even well into the later part of one's career. Plus, as neuropsychology continues to expand globally, this text may grow to encompass an even greater diversity of neuropsychological clinical and scientific education, training, and practices. But these are issues for another time, another future edition of this book. For now, I truly hope that you enjoy your journey through this *Roadmap*.