

he journey for students enrolled in Roosevelt University's PsyD program for clinical psychologists is long and difficult, but most importantly, rewarding.

Just ask PsyD student Christa Marshall, who works with war veterans, or recent PsyD graduate Robert Woods, who has been a therapist at youth homes, substance-abuse centers and Illinois correctional facilities, or PsyD student Jenna Felczak, who works with children who have been sexually abused.

"This is a demanding program that accepts only 15 to 20 students a year," said Cami McBride, director of the University's Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) program, which receives more than 100 admission applications annually.

Since its founding in 1996, the American Psychological Association-accredited program has grown dramatically in popularity and stature because of a multi-dimensional approach that includes practice in the field, scientific research and teaching opportunities at the college level. "There are few programs out there that emphasize, or even offer, all of these components," said James Choca, chair of the Department of Psychology. "As a result, our PsyD program is highly competitive and our academic quality is outstanding."

At the end of their training, PsyD students apply for a year-long clinical internship that is similar to a medical residency. Thus far, 93 percent of prospective interns have been placed for the 2010-11 academic year, including two students whose stories are featured in this article.

Roosevelt's placement success far outpaces the national average, which is 77 percent, and the internship-matching process still is ongoing. Also, all of Roosevelt's PsyD students were placed in internships the last two years, a remarkable accomplishment considering the competitiveness of the application process, which relies on a national, computerized database that matches increasing numbers of PsyD students nationwide with decreasing numbers of internship sites across the country.

"Every year, there are more and more PsyD students who aren't being matched with internship sites," said Catherine Campbell, director of training for the Department of Psychology. "Not only do we hold workshops on how to navigate this process, but we also assist our students by reviewing and critiquing everything they submit," she said.

Roosevelt's PsyD program is rigorous. It takes five to seven years to complete as students spend more than 100 hours in the classroom and complete 4,500 hours of field work. Graduates are qualified to diagnose and treat people with psychological problems.

"We look for candidates who can demonstrate that they have the ability – and the desire – to work closely with those who are often marginalized with mental health issues that need to be addressed," said McBride. "You have to have a sincere interest in helping others, and our students are choosing Roosevelt because that is what the University is all about."

Five graduates and current students of the PsyD program recently told Roosevelt Review about their field work and career goals. Here are their stories.

JENNA FELCZAK (MA, '08)

At Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, where she provides therapy for sexually abused children, Jenna Felczak's youngest client is three years old, and her oldest is 17. "It's hard to work with sexually abused children," she acknowledges, "but I feel that somebody needs to be there for these kids and I get fulfillment working with them."

A third-year PsyD student, Felczak counseled troubled children at inner-city Catholic schools in Chicago through the not-for-profit United Stand agency in 2007 and 2008. She now works with police officers, lawyers, doctors and others at the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, where all reported cases of sexual abuse in Chicago are reviewed.

"Jenna's knowledge in the treatment of trauma appears to be superior to those of her peers with a similar level of clinical training and experience," said Ana Nunez, mental health manager at the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center. "I was particularly impressed with her ability to complete a risk assessment for a teen who was suicidal and required hospitalization," added Nunez, who is Felczak's supervisor.

Felczak, who will graduate in 2011, already has landed an internship for the 2010-11 academic year at Advocate Family Network in Oak Lawn, Ill. "I'm strong enough to do this," said Felczak of her decision to make a life's career doing therapy with abused children.

"I feel a sense of obligation because there are not a lot of people who want to do this," she said. "Sexual abuse is a taboo topic that kids can't talk about – even with their own families. Someone has to be there, and I'm glad I can do it."

Her dissertation will be on developmental differences in adolescents with symptoms of depression.



CRAIG WOODWORTH

Craig Woodworth, a third-year PsyD student at Roosevelt, has won a prestigious scholarship through the U.S. Army's Health Professions Scholarship Program.

Woodworth was chosen to receive the highly competitive award in part because of his interest in helping others. As a recipient, he is receiving two years of free tuition and an internship opportunity with the U.S. Army.

"We look for people who want to help someone else - not just themselves," said U.S. Army Captain Michael Rakow, commander of Chicago Army health care recruiting. "Craig is just an outstanding candidate and I have no hesitation about his capabilities," said Rakow.

A second lieutenant in the Army reserves, Woodworth has worked at both the Jesse Brown Veterans Administration Medical Center and Hines VA Hospital. "There is a pressing need for clinical psychologists in the Army because so many returning from war are in need of help," he said. Woodworth is doing his dissertation on perception, specifically the written vs. the spoken word, and how reading vs. hearing impacts the memory.

BEST AND BRIGHTEST

PsyD students Jenna Felczak (left) and Kyle Kittleson (below) will be interns in the fall at sites that are accredited by the American Psychological Association. Meanwhile, Craig Woodworth (right), now in his third year of the PsyD program, is planning to do a military internship as part of his U.S. Army scholarship.





KYLE KITTLESON (MA, '01; MA, '07)

PsyD student Kyle Kittleson, who will graduate in 2011, is bringing national recognition to Roosevelt University's PsyD program.

Kittleson, who holds master's degrees in psychology and sociology from Roosevelt, is the winner of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Committee Student Award from the National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology.

"Kyle often stands up for the rights of the GLBT clients he's assisted," said Roosevelt University Psychology Professor Steven Meyers, who nominated Kittleson for the national award.

As a longtime volunteer in Chicago's GLBT community, Kittleson has advocated for policy changes combating anti-gay harassment in public schools and has worked to support extending rights in Illinois for gay and lesbian couples.

In his career, he wants to counsel college students, and has already worked in the field at Governors State University and the Illinois Institute of Technology. "There's a real need for therapists who can work with college students," he said. "It's a time of transition for them as they go out into the world." Kittleson's dissertation will examine body image among gay men.

Kittleson already has landed an internship for next year with the counseling center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



ROBERT WOODS (MA, '00; PSYD, '09)

Robert Woods conducts narcotics and gang investigations with the Chicago Police Department, but his heart is in helping troubled children. "I've always enjoyed the experience of working with youth," said Woods, who received his master's degree in community counseling from Roosevelt in 2000 and his PsyD in December 2009.

In 2005-06, Woods worked with kids being treated for substance abuse at Chicago's Gateway Foundation. "You get the feeling you're making a difference in the lives of children who are most at risk," he said. "A lot of the times you find that you might be the first positive force in these kids' lives."

Woods' internship was working with adults in Illinois prisons. Because of lengthy sentences, he found that many of the men and women there could hope for little more than a sense of peace. "He was able to connect with just about every person there," said Christine Foskett, an Illinois School of Psychology student who interned with Woods at the maximum-security Stateville and Dwight correctional centers. "He made inmates feel special and gave them a sense that they had something positive to give to the world, and I think our profession is fortunate to have someone like him."

Woods wrote his dissertation on theories on the development of psychopathy; as a result, he has become interested in criminal profiling. He currently is doing postdoctoral work with troubled teens at Chicago's Northside Lawrence Hall Youth Services. He hopes to be a catalyst in expanding mental-health services for Chicago police officers and firefighters.





CHRISTA MARSHALL (MA, '08)

Christa Marshall, who will receive her PsyD in 2012, knows that she wants to work with U.S. military veterans.

"These are people who have seen the worst of humanity," said Marshall, who has a master's from Roosevelt and has spent two years working with veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq at the Jesse Brown and Hines VA hospitals, both located in the Chicago area. "They're struggling with what they've seen and experienced, and I'm happy to listen to them and to try and help them find ways to make sense of things."

Some of the veterans Marshall sees are homeless. Others are mentally ill. Many have difficulty coping with war's violence, often the worst kind involving injuries to children. "Christa has developed impressive interview skills," said David Kinsinger, a clinical neuropsychologist at Hines VA Hospital and Marshall's supervisor. "She also has great rapport with our patients."

At Hines, Marshall evaluates veterans for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and/or brain injuries that are frequently being diagnosed among those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. She also assesses older veterans for a variety of cognitive disorders. "Soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq might not have physical head wounds, but they are reporting symptoms of brain damage because of the repeated bomb blasts they've been exposed to," she said.

For her dissertation, Marshall will examine how well current VA testing protocols are able to distinguish post-traumatic stress disorder from traumatic brain injury. "I used to watch the TV news and nothing affected me, but working with veterans has changed my perspective," she said. "I now feel it's my job to make people understand the consequences of war. I can no longer be a spectator."

INSPIRED MINDS

Robert Woods and Christa Marshall are good listeners who reach out every day to help others. Woods, who received his PsyD degree from Roosevelt in December 2009, gets fulfillment out of working with troubled kids. Marshall, a PsyD student, is drawn to helping military veterans.