



The Wright Institute Sanctuary Project

An Innovative Training Program for Doctoral Students in Clinical Psychology

Brenda Padilla, MSSW, PsyD
The Wright Institute, Berkeley, CA

HISTORY

Wright Institute Sanctuary Project (WISP) is a supplemental practicum program for advanced level doctoral students in clinical psychology at The Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA. The program was developed in collaboration with the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant. The program provides assessment services for undocumented immigrants seeking asylum.

Goals of the program:

- Provide assessment services to an underserved population, undocumented immigrants seeking asylum
- Address the educational needs of graduate clinical psychology students in the developing competency of assessment

Psychologist's Role in the Asylum Process

WISP has identified several key clinical activities psychologists perform as part of the asylum process:

- Conduct psychological evaluations for asylum applicants, in order to provide evidence of extraordinary circumstances impacting the one-year deadline
- Evaluate how past traumatic experiences in their country of origin have impacted their mental health and daily functioning
- Provide competency evaluations to determine whether a refugee or asylum seeker may participate in immigration court proceedings
- Promote culturally informed services, support, treatment, and recommendations for asylum seeking populations focused on the impact of trauma on mental health and level of functioning
- Consult with immigration attorneys, judges and others regarding the impact of trauma on asylum seekers and vicarious trauma on the people who support them

KEY COLLABORATORS

The Wright Institute (<http://www.wi.edu>)

- founded in 1968 by the distinguished psychologist, Nevitt Sanford, a pioneer in the integration of social issues and clinical psychology
- offers two programs, where students obtain either an APA accredited doctorate of psychology (Psy.D.) in clinical psychology or a master of arts (M.A.) in counseling psychology
- committed to educating *clinicians to society* as defined below:
 - psychologists who can serve the public
 - meet community needs with a rich understanding of the impact of individual differences on the practice of their profession
 - function effectively in a diverse society

East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (<http://eastbaysanctuary.org>)

- formed in 1982, when East Bay congregations united in a covenant to provide sanctuary to Central American asylum seekers
- non-political organization that does not actively lobby for a change in the laws; represents immigrants as they navigate the United States Immigration System
- offers sanctuary, solidarity, support, community organizing assistance, advocacy, and legal services to those escaping war, terror, political persecution, intolerance, exploitation, and other expressions of violence
- has now grown to represent people from all over the world and completed over 500 asylum cases last year

WISP Client Population 2011-2014
(primary claim for asylum)



Components of a Psychological Evaluation

- ❖ Clinical interview
- ❖ Mental status exam
- ❖ Assessment of anxiety and depression
- ❖ Credibility and malingering
- ❖ Cultural Considerations
- ❖ Diagnostic impressions and recommendations

Selected WISP Training Topics

- ❖ Working with Interpreter/Translator
- ❖ Effort and Malingering
- ❖ Conceptualization of Trauma
- ❖ Cultural Considerations-common presenting symptoms
- ❖ Stressors in immigration process

ASYLUM IN THE UNITED STATES

Asylum is a form of protection granted by the United States government allowing an individual to remain in the country. You must apply for status within a year of arrival.

A **Refugee** is "a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of **race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion**".

An **Asylum Seeker** is an applicant for asylum in the United States or at a U.S. port of entry, who meets the definition of a refugee as stated above.

QUALITATIVE STUDENT FEEDBACK

"It was a really rewarding experience to see how a psychological assessment fits into the immigration process and how it can make a real difference in someone's life."

"I am very glad I had the opportunity to work with the EBSC through the WISP practicum. It is one of the more rewarding experiences I have had during graduate school!"

"Fantastic learning experience, including clinical interviewing and assessment, report writing, program development, and a broader understanding of political and cultural contexts."

DEDICATION

This poster is dedicated to all the immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented people who arrive in the United States with hope for the future and to all the health professionals that offer culturally informed assessment, treatment, advocacy, and support.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Brenda Padilla, MSSW, PsyD
WISP Clinical and Training Coordinator
bpadilla@wi.edu; <http://wi.edu/training-wisp>