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The Wright Institute Sanctuary Project (WISP)

The Wright Institute Sanctuary Project (WISP) is a graduate training program that provides assessment services for undocumented immigrants seeking asylum. This program focuses on the needs of a general asylum seeking population, with a specific relevance to some of the populations that may be served in the Northern California area due to its particular immigration patterns and demographics. The program was developed in order to provide services to an underserved population, undocumented immigrants seeking asylum, and to further address the educational needs of graduate psychology students in the developing competency of assessment. This handout briefly describes some of the literature and resources relevant to the history of the training program, the asylum seeking process, the specific populations served by the training program, and the standard components of a psychological evaluation.

History: The Wright Institute Sanctuary Project Practicum began, during the 2011-2012 academic year, as a pilot program collaborating with the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC) in Berkeley, California. The Wright Institute Sanctuary Project Practicum was developed as a separate practicum with unique didactic training and supervision for the 2012-2013 academic year.

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I N S T I T U T E

The Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA, was founded in 1968 by the distinguished psychologist, Nevitt Sanford, a pioneer in the integration of social issues and clinical psychology. The Wright Institute offers two programs, where students obtain either a doctorate of psychology (Psy.D.) in clinical psychology or a master of arts (M.A.) in counseling psychology. The Institute is committed to educating clinicians to society – 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, and who can function effectively in a diverse society. (<http://www.wi.edu>)



East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC) in Berkeley, CA 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. EBSC was formed in 1982, when East Bay congregations united in a covenant to provide sanctuary to

Central American asylum seekers. Since that time, EBSC has grown to represent people from all over the world. EBSC is a non-political organization. We do not actively lobby for a change in the laws; we only represent immigrants as they navigate the often confusing United States Immigration System. (<http://eastbaysanctuary.org>)

Asylum in the United States: According to United States law, a refugee is a person who has left their country of origin and “is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution” due to one of five scenarios which include “race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”. Asylum seekers are defined as individuals who meet the criteria for refugee status but have arrived to the United States on their own accord in search of safety, therefore requesting asylum status once they are in the country. If an asylum seeker is able to prove refugee status by demonstrating one of the above scenarios, then one is technically eligible for asylum.

Referrals: The majority of clients seen by students in the WISP training program are from three main groups of persecuted populations: the Guatemalan, Mam Mayan population who have experienced political violence, a population that have experienced domestic violence, and a sexual minority population that have experienced persecution. The majority of the clients served by the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant have immigrated from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

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: Completing a Psychosocial History, Working with Interpreter/Translator, Effort and Malingering, Conceptualization of Trauma-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Cultural Considerations-presenting symptoms, Stressors in immigration process.

Selected References/Resources:

Smith, M. (1996). *Sanctuary Stories*. Bilingual Review Press.

Rivas-Vazquez, R. A., Blais, M.A., Rey, G.J., & Rivas-Vazquez, A. A. (2001). A brief reminder about documenting the psychological consultation. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(2), 194-199.

Okawa, J. B. (2008). Considerations for the cross-cultural evaluation of refugees and asylumseekers. In L. A. Suzuki & J. G. Ponterotto (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural assessment: Clinical, psychological, and educational applications* (3rd Ed.), 165-194. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Wilson, J. P. (2007). The lens of culture: Theoretical and conceptual perspectives in the assessment of psychological trauma and PTSD. In J. P. Wilson & C. S. Tang (Eds.) *Cross-Cultural assessment of psychological trauma and PTSD*. (pp. 177-193) New York: Springer Science+ Business Media LLC.