

Summary of the 2013 and 2014 MSRC Pre-Conference Workshops

Raymond Tucker, M.S.

3rd year clinical psychology graduate student

Oklahoma State University

May 2014

The Military Suicide Research Consortium (MSRC) hosted a pre-conference workshop at the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) annual conference in both 2013 and 2014 to provide advanced training for graduate students, interns, and post-doctorate fellows interested in military suicide research. During these workshops, professionals in the field provided mentorship for student-submitted projects as well as delivered lectures and facilitated conversations regarding important aspects of suicide research with military samples. This white paper provides an overview of the didactic sessions presented during these pre-conference workshops in order to further disseminate this information to those interested in suicide research among military populations.

The executive directors of the MSRC, Dr. Thomas Joiner (Robert O. Lawton Professor of Psychology at Florida State University) and Dr. Peter Gutierrez (Clinical/Research Psychologist VA ECHCS/MIRECC), provided students with information regarding securing funding for suicide research during both the 2013 and 2014 workshops. Further, they discussed the importance of understanding the goals of prospective funding sources. Dr. Joiner and Dr. Gutierrez reported that the Department of Defense (DOD) is most likely to fund intervention research and projects that will be done well, by an expert team, and will be executed quickly. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) are more likely than the DOD to fund projects about why people desire suicide and die by suicide. Regardless of the funding source, the directors stressed the following important points: (1) Demonstrate that only you and your research team could execute the proposed study (best rationale is empirical rationale); (2) Discuss how your study will move forward the agenda of saving lives from suicide; (3) Discuss the return on the investment that the funding agency is being asked to make; (4) Provide a clear statement of the problem being researched and why it should be researched in the target population; and (5) Attempt to include pilot data. The directors also stressed the importance of budgeting appropriate time for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and of including an IRB coordinator position in the proposed project budget if possible.

Dr. Marjan Holloway (Associate Professor of Medical and Clinical Psychology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences) provided tips for submitting successful IRB proposals for grants and other research projects during the 2014 workshop. Dr. Holloway encouraged students to consider the following things when completing IRB applications: (1) Potentially utilize a consent quiz for participants to ensure they understand the study; (2) Demonstrate a strong risk management plan (utilize Lifelines for at-risk participants); (3) Define what could be construed as imminent risk and discuss how it will be handled, especially if the protocol has greater than minimal risk concerns; (4) Discuss how the project team will handle accidental disclosure by participants; (5) Follow NIH guidelines for data monitoring; (6) Apply for a certificate of confidentiality from <http://nih.gov>; (7) Discuss how the project team will report adverse events, both serious and non-serious; (8) Attend a Public Responsibility in

Medicine & Research (PRIM&R) conference; and (9) Consider discussing the project protocol with legal representatives assigned to the university. Dr. Holloway also mentioned that many advanced professionals are willing to review grant and project IRBs and that a researcher should not be afraid to ask for advice from these individuals.

Dr. Kelly Cukrowicz (Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at Texas Tech University) facilitated a conversation with trainees regarding career options in military suicide research during both the 2013 and 2014 workshops. She detailed the pros and cons of working in a university, academic medical, and Veteran Affairs (VA) setting. Dr. Cukrowicz’s points are detailed in the following table.

University Pros	University Cons	Academic Medical Center Pros	Academic Medical Center Cons	VA Pros	VA Cons
<p>Scheduling flexibility.</p> <p>Hard money - strong career stability.</p> <p>Opportunity to mentor young clinicians and researchers.</p> <p>Research interest can be flexible.</p>	<p>Potentially less mentoring for grants.</p> <p>May be less likely to receive federal funding.</p> <p>Hard to study high risk and military samples.</p>	<p>Strong support for grants.</p> <p>Could be funded on other PI’s grants/supplement income with clinical work.</p> <p>Access to high risk populations.</p> <p>May be competitive for K Award and T-32 awards.</p>	<p>Soft money – less career stability.</p> <p>Less schedule and research interest flexibility.</p>	<p>Strong support for pursuing grants.</p> <p>Could be funded on other PI’s grants/supplement income with clinical work.</p> <p>Access to high risk samples.</p>	<p>Soft money – less career stability.</p> <p>Research moves slowly.</p> <p>Less schedule and research interest flexibility.</p>

Dr. Sean Joe (Associate Professor of Social Work and Psychiatry at the University of Michigan) in 2013 and Dr. Thomas Joiner in 2014 provided professional development tips. These mentors stressed the importance of collaboration as more senior researchers might have data to help answer potential research questions or have valuable input regarding potential projects. Both mentors encouraged students to meet researchers at conferences and to contact authors of influential articles that inform their research questions. Dr. Joiner offered the guidance, “Offer, don’t pester, then deliver.” He also mentioned that a collaborator’s value is in his or her actions, so if a collaboration opportunity arises, meeting deadlines and following through on responsibilities are of the utmost importance. Both mentors encouraged students not to be afraid to ask a more senior researcher about how they may be able to assist with their research agenda. Dr. Sean Joe also mentioned the importance of creating a tracking system for projects. Such a system may include who is a part of a project and in what capacity do they serve, a general

timeline, which journal or journals the project will be submitted to, and how to determine if a member of the project team is not carrying his or her share of the workload.

Dr. Michael Allen (Director of Research, Colorado Depression Center and Senior Investigator, VISN 19 Suicide MIRECC), Dr. Joiner, and Dr. Gutierrez provided students with tips for publication during both the 2013 and 2014 workshops. These journal editors encouraged students to write at least 25 words every day, to read in and out of their research niches, and to tell readers how their work advances the literature, but avoid expressions such as “This is important,” and “This is an interesting finding,” especially in discussion sections. Dr. Joiner encouraged students to track their H-index (an H-index of 3 illustrates three papers cited three or more times each) and, for an assistant professor position, to aspire for an H-index of 10-12. Dr. Allen mentioned that it is acceptable to contest an editor’s decision, but that one should do so professionally but not when the article was rejected for major methodological flaws. He also encouraged students to remember that they have value to journals, noting that publishing is a marketplace in which journals need articles as much as authors need publishers. All three editors encouraged students to address all comments contained in a Revise and Resubmit letter. Even if the suggested changes are not made, they should be discussed in a response letter and a justification should be provided for not making these changes. Dr. Allen also noted that the likelihood of an article being published often is decided before the study is conducted. He encouraged students to develop strong studies that advance the literature and to execute them correctly. This will make their manuscripts the most competitive for publication.

Dr. Jon Maner (Professor of Psychology at Florida State University) in 2013 and Dr. Mike Anestis (Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Southern Mississippi) in 2014 discussed writing the methods and results sections of grants and manuscripts. Both mentors stressed that being clear and concise and avoiding tangents in these sections is important. They suggested that both of these sections should be written as if tired, cranky grant/journal reviewers are reading them. Dr. Maner discussed the importance of revisiting specific project aims in the methods and statistics sections and that the researcher should be clear as to what specific aim is being tested and how. Both mentors stressed the importance of utilizing tables and figures for data when appropriate instead of writing such information in text form. Dr. Anestis stressed the importance of a method section that functions as a recipe that a researcher should be able to easily replicate upon reading. Dr. Anestis also mentioned that there is less of a need to explain widely used statistics (e.g., ANOVAs) in great detail, but newer statistical methods (e.g., Bootstrapping and Process) should be thoroughly discussed, including citations of similar studies utilizing such methods.

The mentors who participated in the 2013 and 2014 MSRC pre-conference workshops provided students with valuable career development information to improve their chances of success as researchers. This white paper attempts to synthesize more than ten hours of didactic sessions and discussions facilitated by these professionals. Students who attended these workshops - myself included - can attest to the importance of these teachings. In addition to the career development information presented, I received valuable mentorship regarding my dissertation and a side project I hope to submit for grant funding. Attendees also had opportunities to network with other students and professionals in the field in order to develop future collaborations. I am extremely thankful for the opportunity to attend these workshops. I encourage students to

consider applying for future MSRC workshops as well as mentors to support their students in applying for the MSRC Pre-conference Travel Award to attend future trainings. I was unable, of course, to provide all of the information discussed by the presenters at these workshops, but I would be happy to share my notes from the trainings with those interested in learning more about the workshops and about military suicide research.

Raymond Tucker
raymopt@okstate.edu