

Petrenko Lab PhD Application FAQ

This document reflects my personal opinions only. They may not reflect those of the other faculty in the Psychology Department or the University of Rochester.

What are your roles in the Department/University?

I have been employed as faculty at the University of Rochester since July 2011. I hold several roles and affiliations within the University, which makes my email signature line a bit complex ☺.

My primary formal title is currently Research Associate Professor, which is a non-tenure track appointment. This means I do not generally teach formal undergraduate and graduate courses in the department. All of my research projects and staff are located at Mt. Hope Family Center (MHFC), which is part of the Psychology Department. MHFC has over a 35-year history of conducting rigorous psychological research and providing clinical services to children, adults, and families from a wide range of economic and environmental backgrounds within Rochester, NY and surrounding areas. It is centrally located in the Corn Hill neighborhood just minutes from UR campus. You can read more about MHFC and the fantastic training opportunities available to students at this link: <https://www.psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/>

I was previously the Associate Director of Clinical Training (2017-2021) and Director of Clinical Training (2021-2025) of the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program. I am considered “core faculty” within the Psychology Department, even though I am not tenure-track. I have the same ability to admit and mentor students as other faculty.

In addition to my affiliation with the Psychology Department, I also have an appointment in Pediatrics. I co-direct an FASD Diagnostic Clinic & Intervention Service within the Division of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics at the University of Rochester Medical Center. This includes a clinical externship available to all students in the program (usually years 3+).

Will you be reviewing applications this cycle?

YES: I am reviewing applications for Fall 2026 matriculation and hope to accept 1 student.

What do current/upcoming research projects focus on?

My work broadly focuses on increasing access to care for people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) across the lifespan. Although FASD is estimated to affect 1-5% of the US population, few professionals have the knowledge or skills to effectively serve people with this developmental disability. As a result, my lab is leveraging technology, such as mobile and digital health technologies, to develop and test new versatile and scalable interventions to increase accessibility.

My research is largely funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). You can learn more about recent and current studies through the following sites:

- www.fmconnect.com: This is the website for an app we have developed through an NIAAA-funded grant. You can read about the app, recent publications, and past issues of a lab newsletter here.

- <https://providers.fmfconnect.com/>: We are continuing to build on the FMF Connect app, including a provider-assisted version for mental health providers to use with families. You can learn more about this project at this website. This study is actively recruiting providers around the US through 2027.
- www.cifasd.org: Several of my current grants are a part of the Collaborative Initiative on FASD (CIFASD), funded by NIAAA. You can learn more about CIFASD, our projects, and existing data available for other researchers to analyze.
- <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/yHskkMyWNkGIHvVlxYgwUw/projects>: You can read summaries of all of the grants I have received through NIH Reporter. These include:
 - [Social Problem Solving and Prenatal Alcohol Exposure](#) (2005-2006) – this was my dissertation study
 - [Development and Evaluation of a Preventive Intervention for Children with FASD](#) (2011-2015) – this was my first grant as a faculty member at UR
 - [Development and Evaluation of an Evidence-Based Mobile Health Caregiver Intervention for FASD](#) (2017-2022) – this is the project in which we developed the Families Moving Forward Connect app through CIFASD
 - [Parent Emotion Socialization and Child Emotion Regulation in FASD](#) (2018-2021) – this project tested an 8-week parent emotion coaching intervention
 - [Mobile Health Tools to Promote Health in Adults with FASD](#) (2021-2023) – we are developing an app in partnership with adults with FASD within CIFASD
 - [Leveraging Technology to Increase Quality of Life for FASD Across the Lifespan](#) (2022 – 2027) – this is our newest CIFASD grant developing mobile and digital interventions across the lifespan
 - [Developing a Scalable FASD-Informed Person-Centered Planning Intervention](#) (2023-2028) – we are developing an online person-centered planning intervention for young adults with FASD leveraging their social networks.
- <https://www.psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/developmental-complexities/>: you can read about my various research projects and clinical services under the Developmental Complexities tab at Mt. Hope Family Center. My students also have access to the training and research data archive at Mt. Hope Family Center.

What research interests would best fit your lab for the 2026-27 admissions cycle?

Students who are interested in researching novel ways to increase access to care for underserved populations are a great fit for my lab. I cannot think of a population more underserved than people with FASD. People with FASD also often have multiple intersecting marginalized identities that can further impact access to supports.

My lab values team science and collaboration. Team members and collaborators within and external to the University involve disciplines including engineering, nursing, pediatrics, public health, education, and diverse mental health fields. The theoretical orientation of my lab emphasizes developmental psychopathology and self-determination theory. Our study designs are informed by implementation science and we utilize mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) in data collection and analysis. Students interested in these approaches are a good fit.

What are you looking for in a graduate student?

Most students (as well as broader society) have not had the opportunity to learn about fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD). As a result, I do not expect students to have background on FASD. That knowledge is easy enough to provide to students in a short period. Students with prior research experience on topics such as other developmental disabilities, child maltreatment or trauma, intervention research, mobile health, and/or underserved populations are often good fits with my work. However, I am open to considering applicants with a wide range of past experiences.

I look for the following characteristics in a student:

- Passion/dedication to increasing equity and access to supports
- Orientation towards strengths-based interventions and supports
- Intent to pursue a research-focused career
- Good time management and organizational skills
- Ability to work well independently, as well as within a team
- Strong interpersonal communication skills and writing abilities

Are there any “screening criteria” you use to review applications?

For those applicants who express interest in my lab, I typically do an initial scan of all applicants' materials to identify a subset for more detailed review. I don't typically select applicants who list many faculty within the department, have less focused interests, or emphasize clinical service career objectives for further review.

What is your mentorship style/what are your expectations for graduate students?

I try to offer a warm and supportive mentoring style that is tailored to each students learning needs and goals. In addition to project-based meetings, I typically meet with graduate students working with me individually or in a small group on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. During these meetings we discuss progress on research goals, as well as aspects of clinical training, professional development, teaching (when applicable), and work/life balance. From their start of the program, I proactively work with students to map out a training trajectory that will best prepare them for their larger career goals. This typically involves developing an NIH fellowship application, leading and co-authoring papers, developing relationships with other faculty within and outside the University, obtaining a trainee leadership position on a committees or research society, completing a series of clinical placements, and gaining experience presenting to academic and lay audiences.

I expect students to be able to communicate their interests and learning needs, to openly receive and provide feedback on our student-mentor relationship, and function with appropriate levels of independence (while seeking out guidance when needed).

Should I email you to express interest in applying to the lab?

This step is not necessary. I will be excited to read your submitted application and do not give preference in any way for people who have emailed me. For reasons of equity and time

constraints, I do not generally schedule Zoom or phone meetings prior to meet with applicants prior to application submission. That said, I am happy to answer questions you may have about my work or the application process that are not answered on our website or the materials above.

What social media platforms do you use?

I primarily use LinkedIn for work-related content. You are welcome to follow me if you are interested. You can see some of the great organizations and people with FASD I follow worldwide.

What do you like about Rochester?

I am originally from Ohio, but did my training in San Diego, Minneapolis, and Denver. I have found I prefer mid-size cities with access to the arts, restaurants, and community activities, while also great opportunities for outdoor adventuring. From my experience, Rochester has all of these things and at a lower cost of living than some other places I have lived.

Rochester has also been a great fit for me professionally and also for my family. My husband is also a professor at UR and we have both felt very supported in our growing research programs. It can be challenging to find two academic jobs in the same city where both people can pursue their career goals to the fullest. We have an 13-year-old daughter, two lovable tuxedo cats, and 3 guinea pigs. When we are not working or at school, you can usually find our family adventuring in the outdoors in all seasons. I am happy to provide recommendations for hiking, backpacking, paddling, rock climbing, orienteering, and downhill and cross-country skiing in the Finger Lakes and Adirondack regions 😊.