

In the future, I would like to include AI in each course to model the act of critically engaging with technology. This act helps students develop skills in questioning the utility of our profession's tools. They have experience with critically examining theory, research, and professional guidelines, why not add technology to the mix? I have a learning curve with the technology so I will be engaging in professional development to strengthen my AI muscle. If you would like to learn alongside me, I recommend reviewing the free AI trainings discussed by Kharbach (2023).

As the profession continues to cope with the strains of competition, poor compensation, and lack of diversity, education that emphasizes social justice can help our students learn to advocate for themselves and others. I am reminded of an assignment asking students to review a hospital website for hidden master narratives about stigma and ablism, and students found a long list of content that would be harmful. Just building this eye protects future patients and families. I am also reminded of an assignment asking students to play together online where one group, so tired after their work days, giggled for an entire forty minutes. It was so clear to see how much they needed that time to play. I see each of these small opportunities as ways of bringing social justice education to life, even if through a screen. While in this paper I have chronicled some of the ways I practice social justice pedagogy in my work, I conclude with a request for more ideas. Like my students, I would love to engage in a community dialogue with others to hear what has been most helpful.

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# Recruiting BIPOC Child Life Students and BIPOC Student Perspectives When Applying to Internship Sites

By Kim Corey, CCLS, MS  
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## Reasoning for increasing diversity within the child life profession

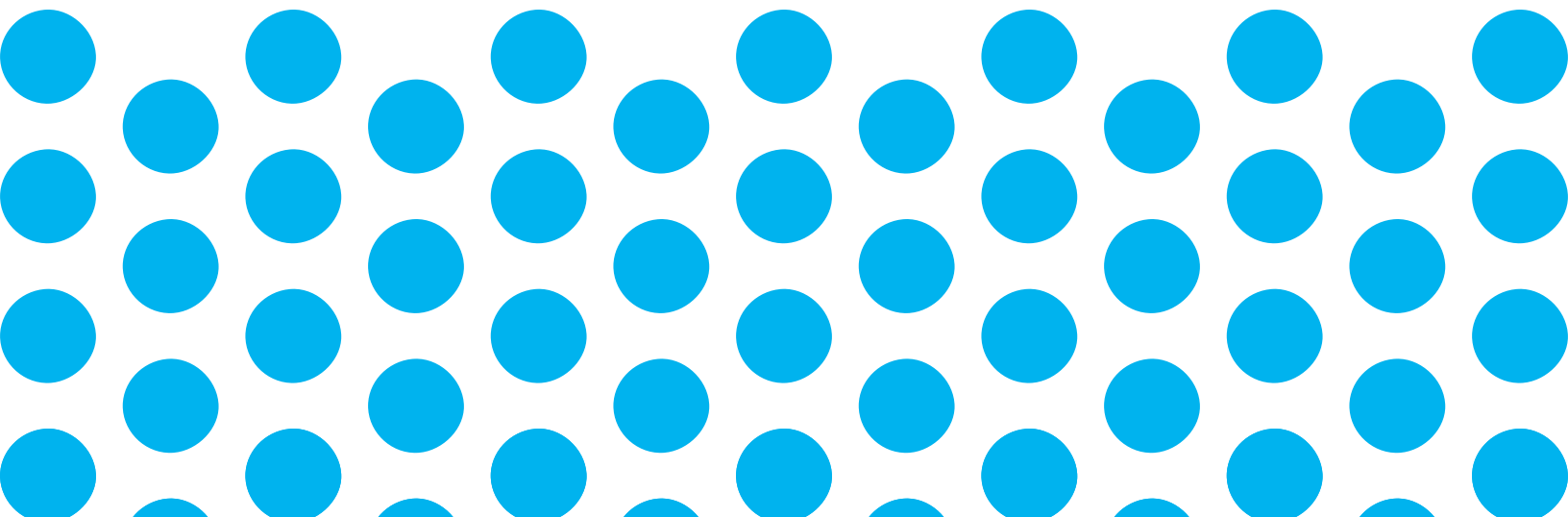
The benefits of increasing diversity within healthcare have been demonstrated to include performance, innovation, productivity, and patient outcomes (Gomez & Bernet, 2019). With 50% of the US population expected to be represented by minorities by 2050, it is imperative that healthcare continues to evolve to combat persistent racial and ethnic disparities, including in the field of child life (Nair and Adetayo, 2019). Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and The Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP) recognize the

increased need to bring diversity to workforces, with the AAP reporting that "Maximizing the diversity of our members and leaders allows the AAP to benefit from the rich talents and different perspectives of these individuals" and the ACLP stating that increasing diversity within the field of "Certified Child Life Specialists is important because the effectiveness of many interventions is linked to a child life specialist's ability to create a relationship that engenders trust with the patient. Having more diversity in our workforce would benefit the children we are serving, as they typically are part of a diverse population" (AAP, 2017; ACLP, 2018).

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According to the ACLP Member Survey, as of 2018, 91% of the responding members who are Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLSs) identify as Caucasian, with 1.5% identifying as Black/African American, 3% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, 1% multiracial, and 1% other (ACLP Member Survey, 2018). Dismayingly, this statistic has not changed from 2003, when the member survey also reported that 91% of responding members identified as White (CLC, 2003). Clearly, diversifying the field of child life continues to be a challenge in many ways. Hammond et al. (2023) even stated that “many clinical supervisors” are “sharing that racial and ethnic diversity is not currently represented in applications received for clinical practicums and internships”. With Hammond et al. and many others engaging in the important work of addressing the root barriers of entrance to the field, internship stands as a hurdle for many, especially candidates from diverse backgrounds that are already in their child life journey. Yet, there is limited research or insight into the experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) child life students and CCLSs about their experiences applying for internship. With an internship being required for qualification as a CCLS, insight into these perspectives could help guide recruitment and support of BIPOC students through the internship experience, directly impacting the growth of diversity in the field of child life.

The perspectives mentioned in this article are each individual's own, and it must be acknowledged that they are not representative of every BIPOC child life student or child life specialist. When it comes to recruitment of BIPOC child life students, reviewers need to “Carefully consider how applications are reviewed or removed from the review pile and if these practices are equitable to students from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and SES backgrounds who do not have the same resources or opportunities as students from the majority culture” (Sisk & Wittenberg, 2021). The following perspectives are from two BIPOC CCLSs and a BIPOC child life student who recently went through the internship application process in

spring 2024. By sharing these experiences, we aim to elevate some of the voices and needs of BIPOC child life individuals to give specific steps/guidance on how internship sites and child life specialists can increase diversity through the internship process.

## Reflections of a BIPOC CCLS on Applying to Internships in 2020

### Assessing Sites for DEI Awareness and Inclusivity

When I was applying to child life internships, the #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate movements were prominent. On one hand, it was empowering to see many people acknowledge racism and the effects of racism. On the other hand, these movements existed due to systematic racism and hatred. And that terrified me as a person of color (POC). I was lucky at the time to be living in a metropolitan city that had a very diverse population where I didn't feel like I stood out. However, there was no guarantee that I would be able to secure an internship site in that city (and I did not) due to the nature of child life internship acquisition. Knowing I had to expand my search, I was very intentional about applying to internship sites due to my *concerns and fears of being attacked for my race, and concern that if something did happen to me, would the hospital/internship site advocate for and support me?* Overall, I did not apply to internship sites in specific locations due to these fears concerning my physical and emotional safety. However, the few that I did apply to despite these fears demonstrated a few key things that made me feel like I could apply there.

1. **Diversity statements:** Whether the statements were specifically on the child life department's site or on the hospital site, I took these into account. However, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement on a child life department website was especially noteworthy. While these statements didn't guarantee my safety, they did demonstrate a commitment to and awareness of the importance of DEI that I could point to and feel more secure.

2. **DEI Scholarships:** When a child life internship site prioritized and offered a DEI scholarship, this similarly demonstrated to me not only an awareness of the importance of DEI, but a commitment made through actions and not just words to support candidates from diverse backgrounds. The existence of these scholarships showed recognition of the hardships that many students of color face; hardships that are acknowledged to be exasperated due to COVID-19 by Sisk and Wittenberg (2021).
3. **DEI Related Questions:** While I know many people who lamented having extra questions to answer in internship applications, when I found an application that asked you to answer a question about DEI, that demonstrated to me that the internship site truly wanted to find candidates from diverse backgrounds and prioritized and cared about the values of DEI.

### Evaluating Offers with DEI Awareness and Inclusivity in Mind

Not everyone has the privilege of getting more than one internship offer, but I was someone who did. When it came time for me to choose where I selected, I considered:

1. **Specific DEI Interview Questions:** This was one of the biggest factors in determining the internship site that I chose. I appreciated and valued any hospital that asked candidates about their DEI experiences and viewpoints. Asking these questions demonstrated to me a respect for and value of DEI. What made my chosen internship site stand out to me is that they took it a step further and asked me a specific situational question related to DEI that I still remember to this day: “What would you do if you accidentally used the wrong pronoun for a patient?” I had no other program ask me a question like that, and the fact that they even recognized the importance of respecting and using pronouns stood out to me.
2. **Location and accessibility:** I did not have access to a car during internship. I assessed the following

- factors: availability of publication transportation, hospital location, safe walking paths, and the knowledgeability of the internship site on resources and offers of support.
3. **Representation on the interview panel:** I always felt a sense of relief and/or excitement to see someone who looked like me or another person of color. It reassured me that if I went to that internship site, there would be someone who could better understand my experience as a person of color and a potential resource for support.



## A BIPOC Student Assessment after utilizing the New ACLP Common Application in 2024

### Assessment of Sites and their Value of Diversity

1. **Staff and Population Diversity:** When it came to choosing where to apply, I often searched for hospitals where diversity was present not only among the child life team, but the hospital and the patients they serve. As a woman of color, it was important for me to find an environment where I would feel most comfortable and accepted, and where I could learn among a diverse pool of patients, families and staff.

Although I was aware that the field of child life is pre-dominantly made up of white professionals, finding a child life team at a hospital that had mentors that shared similar backgrounds to me or recognized the importance DEI was critical as well. I sought to find a location where the team's values aligned with my own.

2. **Location:** Additionally, my decision of applying/accepting internship offers depended on the location of the hospital. I avoided a hospital where I not only felt that DEI was limited or absent, but also if the state or city in general felt unsafe for me; I would be living in a new environment with no one I'd know, and being a woman of color would make me a target, which made me consider the geographical location.
3. **Learning Opportunities:** Diverse learning opportunities made an internship site especially appealing to me. Whether that be educational through in-services, DEI-based events, or learning opportunities outside of the hospital-setting, I sought a location that would allow me to expand my perspective and knowledge of the child life field.
4. **Policies and Accommodations:** It is a lifetime passion of mine to continue to mend the gaps of DEI-based issues, especially within the healthcare field, so finding the hospital's DEI-mission, values, and the committees in place to address these issues were important in my decision, as well. A location that recognized systematic barriers faced by BIPOC applicants also made an internship site appealing. Though I recognize many internships are unpaid, providing other accommodations or resources that can help to relieve not only financial burdens, but mental challenges were important to me. For example, a hospital/team that provided resources to guide students in finding housing, transportation, and hospital attire was appealing.

### Interview Obstacles

1. **Feeling Othered + Imposter Syndrome:** I also experienced imposter syndrome during interviews, feelings of unworthiness and self-



doubt of my qualification and skills. BIPOC individuals can especially feel this way due to spaces often perpetuating “cultures and norms that continue to make BIPOC individuals feel excluded” (Khan et al., 2022). BIPOC students can feel as if they do not belong in a team where they look and feel different. This can lead to feeling inadequacy, as if we are not as competent as our peers (Khan et al., 2022; Tenhulzen et al., 2023). During interviews, I was often the ONLY woman of color and that, among the other nerves, made me feel as if I had to impress the team or individual I was interviewing with even more. I experienced the need to emphasize or “fake” a certain tone of professionalism that felt more as if I was immersed into the white-American culture, rather than just being my authentic Korean American self. I felt pressured to ensure my speech and articulation had to be as clear and concise as I delivered my responses. This, among all the other thoughts roaming in my head became a distraction at times during the interview process.

2. **Code Switching and English as a Second Language (ESL):** I spoke to foreign exchange students who went through the practicum interviewing process that felt their interviews were affected by the expectation to speak in their second language, English. They could tell when the interview team was frustrated by the impatient looks when the students took more time to articulate their words or replies. It was

harder for them to deliver the right response and make a positive impression in their second language despite internally knowing what to say.

3. **Team Culture:** I found internship sites more appealing when their child life team seemed close-knit and had a sense of community among themselves. Knowing that the field of child life has such high burnout rates, I was attracted to teams that liked to lighten the mood during interviews or ask fun questions. During group interviews where I could see other interviewees, I already felt different when I often the only woman of color, so seeing a team that emphasized student well-being and reminded them to be themselves during the interview process was something I appreciated.

### Action Steps Forward

As child life specialists, we embrace Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, including the need for safety. We strongly encourage a mindset of growth to meet this need and expand our field by supporting BIPOC students through their child life journey. We caution against reading some of these experiences and thinking, “We can't do anything about that.” We encourage introspection regarding our following recommendations and other ideas for what else can be done to make students feel safe coming to your program. Based on these perspectives, there are steps that every program can take, and many of these insights that have been stated and are summarized below are supported by both the ACLP and research.

1. **Highlight the value of DEI in your program.** Flory et al. (2021) found that “signaling explicit interest” and employing “less invasive approaches” to team member diversity sharply raises interest and applications rates for minority groups. This can be done directly by advertising your desire to recruit minority candidates for practicums and internships on your website and other PR materials, or more indirectly by providing statements and evidence that your program values DEI (ACLP, 2021). This could be through a link to the hospital's DEI Statements or creating one specific for the child

life department (ACLP, 2021).

2. **Incorporate DEI into your application and interview questions.** For instance, ask real life questions that have occurred to child life students, supervisors, or even colleagues. I.e. “What would you do if a patient/family repeatedly called a colleague a derogatory name?” This demonstrates your recognition and value of the importance of DEI in the child life profession and your department/program and per Bombaci & Pejchar, “signaling institutional commitment to DEI” (2022). Additionally, considering that child life intern students are expected to work with patients and families from a variety of backgrounds, these types of questions are advantageous to interviewers to help evaluate how an applicant will interact with diverse patient populations and colleagues (Bombaci & Pejchar, 2022).
3. **Highlight other opportunities the hospital offers related to DEI.** This demonstrates that at an institutional level DEI is valued (Bombaci & Pejchar, 2022). Many hospitals have hospital wide DEI committees, Employee Resource/Support Groups, and DEI related events.
4. **Representation on your interview panels:** Not only can this help candidates feel more comfortable, but this increases diversity of thought and can have a direct impact on choosing diverse candidates. Per the ACLP (2020): “Embrace heterogeneity in thought leadership, staffing, student, and intern recruitment and navigate change management with grace, reflection, and purpose.”
5. **Describe your DEI resources upfront during interviews:** Offer language accommodations like interpreters for students whose primary language is not English so they can show their true, authentic self in interviews and feel more confident to secure an internship in a language that they are most comfortable with. If you don't have DEI resources, reflect on why and start with creating resources. Creating or joining a DEI committee, promoting interpretation services, strengthening multicultural toy representation, finding community-based resources, and researching hospital initiatives.

6. Provide awareness and education among the interviewing child life team regarding “code switching” (switching between different languages or dialects), and how tone, speech, and articulation can be difficult to deliver at times, in order to reduce bias (Brdarević-Čeljo et al., 2024).
7. **Weight for additional considerations:** UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh’s practicum program takes into consideration additional

factors like work experience outside of child related experience, recognizing that finances are a barrier to entrance to the field of child life. For those who must work, instead of being penalized for having less child related experience, students’ experiences working other types of jobs are weighted into their scoring matrix. Perhaps, these types of considerations to experiences can be incorporated into internship scoring matrixes as well.

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# UNDERSTANDING SENSORY NEEDS: Meeting a Child’s Unique World with Compassion and Care

By Elise Huntley, MA, CCLS

It’s a familiar scene. A child and family are in the pre-procedure space and while the healthcare team is trying to speak with the caregivers, the patient is exploring the room by pushing furniture, hitting buttons, pulling cables, and flipping the light switch. Tension is rising in the room and the child life specialist wants to provide preparation and support to the child prior to their procedure. But the patient is communicating via their behavior that

they are too dysregulated to engage in that type of intervention right now. Children with sensory needs often communicate through their behaviors that they have a sensory need that is not being met. By meeting their sensory needs, these children are often able to regulate and reengage. This article is a brief introduction to sensory processing differences along with some strategies that child life specialists can use when supporting these patients.

