Information for prospective applicants to the Virginia Consortium Program in Clinical Psychology (VCPCP) PhD program:

Applicants interested in furthering their research experiences under the mentorship of Dr. Debb should have an interest in an applied social psychological area that incorporates the overlap between human and digital technology/computing. This area of psychology is known as cyberpsychology, and although the scope of this sub-discipline is quite wide, it generally seeks to better understand human behavior as a product of the influence of emerging (digital) technologies. This includes everything from the human aspects of cybersecurity such as personality and attitudes, to social media’s influence on communication, to cultural bias embedded in automation such as machine learning.

Within the Cybersecurity Research Complex at Norfolk State, I have a CyberPsychology Research Lab which has some (basic) research capabilities including eye tracking, EEG, virtual reality, online surveying tools, and statistical analysis software including SPSS and MPlus. My lab works somewhat independent of the Cybersecurity and Computer Science colleagues we share our lab space with; however, we have the ability to collaborate with them as well. I am NOT a cybersecurity expert or a computer scientist, nor do I have training in human factors, modeling/simulation, or HCI/usability testing.

The primary focal area I’m looking for in a research mentee is within the realm of what could be associated with cyberpsychology (I’m very open to the specific area of interest a student brings), although I have several other interests, some that I have experience and some that are simply interest areas. I have direct experience examining resilience and coping particularly as it relates to academic achievement, as well as quality of life assessment (primarily with chronic illness populations, across various cultures and different languages). I have an interest and some background in conflict analysis and resolution, as well as a slightly greater than rudimentary understanding of Israel/Middle Eastern Studies. I am also a Licensed Professional Counselor and have experience working in community-based mental health care and an interest in clinical mental health efficacy (especially as it relates to telehealth—one of the many sub-areas of cyberpsychology).

In your first semester as a first year Doctoral student working with me as a research mentee, you could expect to become acquainted with the research I am currently working on and work on some aspects of my existing projects for 5-10 hours per week. This might include data analysis, reading existing literature, writing short summaries of relevant literature, observing or assisting with an experimental lab study, and meeting regularly one on one—all depending on your skill level coming in. In your second semester, the expectation is that you would begin to formulate your own research idea(s) based on the research I am focusing on, which would eventually become your own independent study under my supervision. As you go into your second and third years, you could expect to work less directly on my projects and more on your own (related) research, as you progress through your clinical training and hone your research skills leading into dissertation.

If you are interested in applying to VCPCP and are considering me as your research mentorship, please feel free to contact me at smdebb@nsu.edu to have an informal discussion.