

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1. **Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed:** Specialist in School Psychology
3. **Date:** January 14, 2013
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5. Overview

The primary goal of the program is to train school psychologists (1) who are *scientist-practitioners*, grounded in the scientific method and research, (2) who are *ethical*, (3) who *respect individual differences and diversity*, (4) who *foster personal and professional characteristics*, and (5) who are *lifelong learners*. This goal is similar to Eastern's mission that encourages free and rigorous inquiry and scholarship, commitment to diversity and inclusion, and reasoned and clear communication skills to become responsible citizens and leaders. The program goal also reflects the mission of graduate education: strengthening diversity, advanced scholarship, and the rigor of the curriculum.

The Specialist in School Psychology Program provides candidates advanced training for working in public schools, private schools, hospitals, medical schools, department of education at the state and national level, and the private sector. The program is based on the scientist-practitioner model, informed by the scientific literature and data. This is a three-year program, 2 years of coursework and 1 year full time internship; and thesis is required. There are six public and three for-profit institutions that train school psychologists in the state of Illinois. Eastern students are highly competitive state wide and nationally; they continue to achieve 100% passing rate on the state (Illinois State Board of Education) and national (National Association of School Psychologists) certification examinations. They are also found in leadership positions in school districts and professional associations.

The primary learning objective is to meet the NASP and ISBE training standards for certifying school psychologists. These standards include 1) Data-Based Decision Making and Accountability, 2) Consultation and Collaboration, 3) Interventions and Instructional Support to Develop Academic Skills, 4) Interventions and Mental Health Services to Develop Social and Life Skills, 5) School-wide Practices to Promote Learning, 6) Preventive and Responsive Services, 7) Family-School Collaboration Services, 8) Diversity in Development and Learning, 9) Research and Program Evaluation, and 10) Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practice. The majority of our graduates practice in the public school system, a few teach in community colleges, and about 5% eventually pursue doctoral degrees.

Since the last review, program faculty published over 50 research articles, they conducted over 100 presentations, and they received three Achievement and Contribution Awards in teaching, four in research and one in service. A few of these publications and presentations were with students. Several faculty served or serve on peer reviewed journals' editorial boards.

6. Major Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Description and assessment of any major changes in the program/disciplinary context, e.g., (1) changes in the overall discipline or field; (2) student demand; (3) societal needs; (4) institutional context for offering the degree; (5) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question; and (6) other.

Change in the Overall Discipline

Changes in the discipline include, “Prevention is intervention” (the medical model), increased emphasis on mental health, and Response to Intervention (RtI). It is understood that (1) prevention is more effective and less costly than intervention, (2) there is a relationship between mental health and learning outcomes, and (3) intervention (all services) must be subjected to on-going evaluation in order to monitor response to intervention, i.e., to determine if the intervention is effective. This preventative and data-based approach is reflected in the current curriculum.

Student Demand

Demand for the program continues to be high, partially because of good job prospects for school psychologists. Each year, the program receives about 40-60 applications for 10 to 12 seats, and those who are accepted are highly qualified. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment growth for school psychologists will reach 22 percent by 2020.

Societal Needs

The demand for school psychologists is high, because the services of school psychologists are mandated by state and Federal laws in all public schools. The demand is fueled by the severity of psychological and learning challenges school children experience. Intervention and prevention of such challenges require a scientific approach school psychologists offer. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), “In the coming years, classrooms will swell and educate more students who have special needs, learning disabilities, and behavioral issues. Schools tending to their needs will increase demand for school psychologists.” In addition, there continues to be a shortage of school psychologists nationwide.

Productivity

Six public institutions in Illinois offer Specialist in School Psychology degree. On the average, the program graduates 9 students each year at a per-credit-hour cost that is 119% of the statewide average. This may be due to the small faculty to student ratio that is required for training competent school psychologists.

Institutional Context for Offering the Degree

The training of school psychologists is highly regulated by the National Association of School Psychologists and the Illinois State Board of Education. Therefore, our program is designed to meet the training standards identified by these accreditation bodies. The program is NCATE approved, and we collaborate with the Certifying Officer in the College of Education for processing certification forms. The program also has membership in the Directors of University School Psychology Programs that addresses school psychology related issues in the state of Illinois.

Other

Effective July 1, 2012, the Illinois State Board of Education made passing the Illinois Certification Examinations a criterion for internship; which means, candidates have to take the examination before completing the required coursework. In order to meet this requirement, course sequence had to be reordered and faculty work load reconsidered.

6.2 Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement.

Learning Outcomes: The student will

- Develop theoretical and background knowledge related to successful practice as a school psychologist (the 10 NASP Training Standards presented under item 5 above)
- Apply knowledge and demonstrate problem solving, communication, and critical thinking in practicum
- Develop an understanding of statistics and research methodology and demonstrate the ability to apply this knowledge
- Demonstrate an understanding of ethical principles and standards in classes and in applied settings
- Demonstrate technological proficiency for research and practice.

Throughout the program, benchmarks are in place for assessing candidates' progress. First, to be admitted to the program, candidates must meet the criteria for prerequisite courses, GPA, GRE, Writing Sample, Interview, and letter of reference. Once in the program, program faculty evaluate candidates each semester on their academic progress and dispositions and provide them with feedback. Candidates are in practica for three semesters in a row, and they are evaluated by their field supervisors. Before internship, candidates complete a portfolio to demonstrate *knowledge competency*, present the portfolio to the faculty, and complete oral comprehensive examinations. They also successfully propose their thesis. On internship, candidates are evaluated by field supervisors; they complete a second portfolio for demonstrating *performance competency*, and also defend their thesis. Finally, they are required to pass the Illinois Certification Examination (basic skills and content area) and the Nationally Certified School Psychologist Examinations (PRAXIS II).

Since the last review, 48 candidates successfully completed the program and passed the Illinois State and Nationally Certified School Psychologists examinations. The program has 100% internship and job placement; and our students are highly regarded in the state of Illinois, and they are employed across the nation. These results indicate program candidates met their learning objectives. A review by the Center for Academic Support and Assessment placed the program on a two-year reporting cycle, indicating mature assessment plans. The school Psychology Program was one of the first few programs to achieve the First Choice Status.

Changes due to Assessment

In the portfolio assessment, currently, program candidates describe how they met their learning objectives and also provide supporting artifacts. This portfolio is then reviewed and rated by the faculty. In order to generate data and provide candidates with better self-assessment, a rating scale will be implemented. They will rate their performance and identify strategies for improvement when indicated.

6.3 Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes

Faculty turnover continues to be a challenge for our program. Institutions with doctoral programs benefit from our loss. Since the last review, two faculty were hired. One already left, and we are currently conducting a search.

Regarding the curriculum, school psychology is always in a flux trying to serve the changing needs of society. The immediate challenge for the public school system is how to provide appropriate and

meaningful education to culturally diverse and English learning students. Thus, almost all our courses address the topic in context (the infusion model).

To encourage timely thesis completion, successful thesis proposal is now a prerequisite for internship, and successful thesis defense for entering the field. Since this requirement was implemented, 100% of the last three cohorts completed their thesis on time.

6.4 Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.

No curricular changes are indicated as a result of this review. The program is a member of the Directors of University School Psychology Programs in Illinois that monitors developments in the field; and we will make the necessary changes when new developments emerge.

Given the budget cut from the state since the last review, resources for instructional needs have been limited. Assessment tools are restricted and must be purchased, e.g., intelligence tests. However, we have been using technology to access free (or minimal fee) training resources and we will continue to do so. Regarding instructional resources, the biggest challenges we face are the lack of a clinic for training purposes and student support for attending conferences. It is promising that the department chair has initiated the process for a clinic. In terms of student support for attending at least the state conference, the students have an association for volunteering and also fundraising to offset the cost of attending a conference. In a small town where many other student organizations also engage in fundraising, the return has been limited.

7. Responses to Institution-Assigned Issues

7.1 Describe departmental strategies for sustaining the first-choice status of the graduate program.

Based on the Graduate School's criteria for the First Choice Designation, the program is committed to diversity, scholarship, curricular development, and research activity by faculty and students. As described in the overview, the faculty are active in research and program candidates conduct original thesis project. For example, this year two students will be presenting their theses at the National Association of School Psychologist Annual Convention. We will continue to at least maintain this level.

Although the program struggles with attracting diverse applicants, it is important to view the reality in context. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, over 90% of school psychologists are Caucasian and mostly women. The reason for this national phenomenon is unclear. Some of our recruitment efforts have included letter writing to institutions with high diversity and reaching out to Psi Chi, the psychology honors society. Although we are not satisfied, currently gender diversity in the program is increasing (29% men) and ethnic diversity has taken a positive direction (.04%). Additionally, the few qualified ethnic minority applicants tend to choose schools in bigger cities than Charleston regardless of attractive offers, e.g., graduate assistantship and application fee waiver. We will continue the effort.

Finally, the field of school psychology is beginning to emerge in the rest of the world; and we hope to attract our share to the program (internalization of the program).

7.2 Describe department plans to support integrative learning.

The field of school psychology is integrative in nature: It applies the science of psychology to education. For instance, our students must demonstrate mastery of knowledge of typical and atypical

human development, principles of learning, factors that impact learning (e.g., mental health, home environment, disabilities), assessment and measurement, program evaluation (to identify the strength and weakness of the educational system and the professionals who deliver services within the system, and the curricula), data, evidence-based academic, psychological, behavioral interventions, diversity in development and learning, ethics and law that govern the practice, and research. The thesis and portfolio requirements are major contributors to integrative learning for our program as well. The process of identifying an area of interest, literature review, research questions, method and research design is followed by a proposal presentation to the thesis committee. And the data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and discussion culminate in a thesis defense that is open to other students and faculty. For the portfolio evaluation, students assess their *mastery of content knowledge and performance competency*. To do this, they must review information from their previous courses and practica experiences to demonstrate to the faculty how they met the standards, including supportive material. Both the thesis and portfolio experiences require divergent views of the topic within and outside of the field, critical thinking, knowledge of statistics, research method, and technology, and both written and oral communication skills. Program candidates are required to attend the Illinois School Psychologists Annual convention. Again, the self-assessment related to the portfolio and conference attendance that exposes students to diverse ideas and practices contribute to integrative learning.

7.3 What interdisciplinary initiatives are under consideration, and how will they enhance the program and better prepare graduates?

As stated above, the field of school psychology is interdisciplinary in training and in practice. Most decisions regarding school children are made by interdisciplinary teams. For instance, the assessment of autism is a multidisciplinary effort, requiring the expertise of school psychologists, among others. Although the program has not been included in conversations about the development of an Autism Center at Eastern to date, such a center will help prepare our students for working with children with autism spectrum disorder and their families.

Another idea the school psychology program faculty is considering is the possibility of expanding the program to prepare candidates for a doctoral degree. Such candidates forgo the full year internship and pursue doctoral degrees. Currently, the majority of candidates enter the field as practitioners after completing the full year internship, and if they want to pursue a doctoral degree, they have to repeat the full year internship as doctoral candidates. In other words, the Master's program will save candidates one full year. This line of conversation led to the idea of a general Master's program that is multidisciplinary in nature, with a school psychology, clinical, cognitive/experimental, neuropsychology tracks. Again, this is a preliminary conversation we hope to advance this year.

Further, for many years now, the school psychology program has provided services to Eastern students with suspected learning disabilities, or those who were diagnosed with a learning disability in K-12, but need an updated evaluation. Advanced students complete this type of evaluation with supervision. The last few years, the demand has increased to the point our students cannot accommodate. Referrals come from the Office of Disability Services at Eastern, Lakeland College, parents of school children who are seeking second opinion, and doctors and clinicians in the area. An informal needs assessment indicated that there is no service for diagnosing learning disabilities in Central Illinois and surrounding areas.

As indicated above, a Clinic is critical for training, and assessment services can be one of the components. With minimal staffing, a graduate assistantship for an advanced student and some release time for faculty, a Clinic can be a great service to the community and our students will benefit

from the experience. Additionally, because it is a needed service in the area, grants related to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) may be sought.

7.4 What one unique, noteworthy activity in the department involved in that will enable the IBHE to distinguish it from other programs in the state?

The School Psychology Program at Eastern is one of the two institutions in Illinois that provides students with classroom-based practicum experience. They learn about the school system and teachers by immersion. This experience prepares them for consulting with teachers to problem solve. We also receive feedback from our graduates telling us the classroom-based practicum was the best experience they had even though they did not know it at the time, and they encouraging us to keep it. The majority of our students are competitive against doctoral students. They score consistently above the mean on the Illinois State and Nationally Certified School Psychologists examinations; this is noteworthy, because the mean includes doctoral candidates.

8. Outcome

8.1 Decision:

_____ Program in Good Standing

_____ Program flagged for Priority Review

_____ Program Enrollment Suspended