Review of the Specialist in School Psychology (S.S.P.)
42.2805

**Context and overview.** The Specialist in School Psychology (S.S.P.) program is housed in the Department of Psychology within the College of Arts and Sciences. The department also offers a B.A., B.S. in Psychology, a M.A., M.S. in Psychology, a M.A., M.S. in Clinical-Counseling Psychology, a Ph.D. in School Psychology, and a minor in psychology. The program is designed to prepare students to function as school psychologists in public or private elementary or secondary schools. Graduates of the specialist program are eligible to sit for the state and national certification exams for school psychologists. Students in the program are referred to as specialist trainees.

This is the first review of the specialist program since 2004. The program review that had been scheduled for 2012 was delayed until 2014 due to changes in the schedule for specialized accreditation of the program. The delay makes possible use of some portions of the program review self-study report for the next specialized accreditation review.

**Self-study process.** The coordinator of school psychology (including the specialist and doctoral programs), the department chairperson, and program faculty conducted the program review self-study with input from current students, alumni, practica and intern supervisors, and members of the school psychology community advisory committee. Applicant, student, and alumni statistics and other data provided by various university offices were also studied. All major stakeholders had input into the self-study, and feedback is being used by program faculty for program enhancement.

**Program curriculum.** The specialist program requires 60 credit hours and is typically completed in three years of full-time study. The curriculum is based on the scientist-practitioner model, whereby the science of psychology is used as a framework within which school psychologists help children. Students complete courses in areas of scientific and professional psychology consistent with standards of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Out of class, students receive clinical training, beginning with practica involving work at the Psychological Services Center on campus and at school-based sites and culminating in a nine-month full-time internship. Over the course of the three-year program, students complete more than 1,800 hours in field-based experiences. Students also complete either an applied research project or a thesis. Students present their research projects at the Graduate School Research Symposium on campus, and many students present at state and national professional conferences.

**Program or unit faculty.** Seven full-time faculty members in the department comprise the core faculty of the specialist program. These same faculty members support students in the doctoral school psychology program. All seven faculty members hold a doctorate in school psychology or clinical psychology, and five of the seven have earned the rank of full professor. All four of the seven faculty members with school psychology degrees are state- and/or nationally-certified school psychologists. Three program faculty members are licensed clinical psychologists. Faculty members serve on journal editorial boards and are active in professional associations including the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). One program faculty member holds the Diplomate in School Psychology of the American Board of Professional Psychology and the Diplomate in Assessment Psychology of the American Board of Assessment Psychology. Faculty members are active in externally-funded research projects, including projects related to teacher training, reintegration of combat veterans, response to intervention, and autism. One faculty member serves as the director of The Autism Place, funded through the Autism Program of Illinois. The Autism Place treats children with autism spectrum disorder while training students to work with those affected by the disorder.

**Program goals and quality indices.** The specialist program seeks to prepare students for state- and national-level certification exams required to practice school psychology. Pedagogical goals of the program include developing knowledge and skills related to data-based decision making, consultation, and collaboration; interventions and instructional support to develop student academic, social, and life skills; skills associated with school-wide practices to promote learning, preventive, and responsive services; family-school collaboration; diversity in development and learning, research, and program evaluation; and legal-ethical and professional practice. The program seeks to recruit high-quality students and increase diversity of the student population. Indicators used by faculty to assess the quality of the specialist program relative to peer and benchmark programs include the quality of faculty, specifically their credentials and accomplishments, contributions to professional organizations and school systems, and innovations in
the field; accreditation status with the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP); strength of curriculum, including the number and variety of field placements and internships; initial job placement rates; student-faculty ratio; and licensing examination pass rates.

**Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process.** The assessment plan for the specialist program involves review of course grades; practica and intern supervisors’ ratings of students’ competency; student portfolios including two case studies; results from the state content test in school psychology and the PRAXIS exam in school psychology; field supervisors’ feedback regarding program quality; student success in securing school-based internships; results of periodic surveys of graduates and their intern supervisors/employers; and the percentage of students who obtain their first positions as school psychologists. The school psychology coordinating committee is responsible for assessment and quality enhancement. The committee consists of the seven school psychology faculty members and two students. Ongoing evaluation and discussions about improvements occur during bi-monthly committee meetings or at special meetings, as concerns are raised and solutions are sought. The committee periodically reviews program content, designs and implements survey analyses, reviews suggestions from field supervisors and students and results of comprehensive assessments, and makes recommendations for changes in course offerings or course content. In 2012, the assessment plan for the specialist program received the highest possible ratings from the Assessment Advisory Council on campus.

**Specialized accreditation.** The specialist program is accredited by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), a specialized professional association affiliated with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), formerly the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NASP last reviewed the specialist program in 2007 and accredited the program for seven years, the maximum allowable number of years. NASP has delayed its subsequent accreditation review until 2016-2017 to better coordinate with the anticipated 2019 review of the teacher education unit at Illinois State by CAEP. The specialist program is also subject to review and approval by the Illinois State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board, affiliated with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The state has authorized the specialist program to recommend school psychology licensure for its graduates (through the Professional Educator License-School Psychology endorsement) by entitlement, which expedites the licensure application process.

**Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review.** The one recommendation resulting from the last program review in 2004 was to obtain more external funding as a means of increasing graduate assistant stipends. Since then, the seven school psychology faculty members have secured over $1 million in grant funds. Those funds have supported 18 half-time graduate assistantships. As a result, all specialist trainees have received financial support during their two years of on-campus training. This was not the case at the time of the prior program review.

**Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand.** Societal factors such as the increasing diversity of students attending public schools, economic challenges facing families and school systems, and legislative changes at the state and national levels have increased the need for school psychologists. One example of potentially impactive legislation, the Affordable Care Act, identifies the school as the service point for child and adolescent mental health and medical services. Also increasing demand for school psychologists is a growing emphasis on the prevention of both academic and social-emotional/behavioral problems and the promotion of positive mental health in school-age children.

**Major findings of this program review self-study.** The specialist program has earned all available specialized accreditations and approvals. Program faculty members are professionally accomplished and well respected in their fields. Enrollment has been stable and sustainable; on average, six students enroll in the program each year, resulting in total program enrollment of approximately 18. The number of enrolled students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the program has increased. Students completing the program succeed at obtaining licensure, certification, and employment, with 100 percent pass rates on both state and national certification exams and a 100 percent placement rate in school psychologist positions. Efforts to secure external funding and to increase diversity of the student population, as well as the number of school-based sites that enroll large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, should be ongoing.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** Initiatives for the next program review cycle include increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of school psychologist graduate students (both specialist trainees and doctoral
trainees), continuing to obtain external research and training grants to financially support all specialist trainees during their first two years in the program and at higher assistantship or stipend amounts, and increasing the number of school-based practicum sites that enroll students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

**Review Outcome.** The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Specialist in School Psychology (S.S.P.) program to be in **Good Standing**.

The Academic Planning Committee congratulates the program for its good standing with the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the Illinois State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board. The latter continues to recognize graduation from the school psychology program at Illinois State University as proof of eligibility for licensing as a school psychologist in the state, thus streamlining the licensing process for graduates.

The committee commends the program for its effective scholar-practitioner model, which has resulted in a 100 percent pass rate among program graduates on the state-level school psychology certification exam, a 100 percent pass rate on the PRAXIS school psychology exam for the Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential, and a perfect record of placing program graduates in school-based positions as school psychologists since the 2004 program review.

The committee recognizes the program for its successful efforts to increase the number of students from historically underrepresented populations during the last five years. Particularly noteworthy, and a model for other such efforts, is formation of the Diversity Task Force of Graduate Students in Psychology as a registered student organization supported by the department and led by students. The task force has successfully utilized peer-to-peer outreach to undergraduate students at universities enrolling high percentages of populations historically underrepresented in the profession and has provided financial support for campus visits and application fees.

At the core of the program is its highly-credentialed and accomplished faculty. All seven core faculty members are scientists-practitioners by training and experience and are licensed or certified as school or clinical psychologists. Program faculty has ranked as high as 18th among 59 school psychology doctoral programs accredited by the American Psychological Association in terms of the number and impact of published journal articles. Faculty members serve on editorial boards of core journals in the discipline, and many have received university or national research or teaching awards. The program coordinator has been honored by the National Association of School Psychologists with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

The committee recognizes program faculty members for their role in establishing the faculty mentoring program in the department since the 2004 program review. As new school psychology faculty members are hired during the next program review cycle, the mentoring program can serve a vital role in acclimating them to the community, university, department, and program and in helping them establish exemplary teaching, research, and service portfolios.

The single committee recommendation resulting from the 2004 program review was to obtain more external funding as one method to increase graduate assistant stipends. The committee congratulates program faculty for its successful efforts in this regard. Grant-funded projects since the last program review have included autism research and establishment of The Autism Place as an affiliate site of The Autism Program of Illinois (more than $1 million in funding), research on reintegration of combat veterans, and work with Illinois schools implementing the Response to Intervention protocols ($600,000 in funding). Through these programs and programs of the Psychological Services Center on campus, citizens of Illinois, including children with learning disabilities, receive quality care, and school psychology students receive valuable training opportunities.

The committee recognizes the program for an exemplary assessment plan that incorporates direct and indirect measures of student learning and a process for analyzing and utilizing student learning outcomes data to improve the program. The plan has received exemplary ratings from the Assessment Advisory Council on campus in all four categories rated, while the National Association of School Psychologists has described the assessment program as “thorough, comprehensive, and infused throughout the program,” with “exceptionally good aggregation of data by NASP domains.”
The committee also recognizes the strong collaboration that has evolved between program faculty and Milner Library. This collaboration has resulted in a high level of integration of research resources, services, and training with the curriculum and faculty research endeavors.

**Recommendations.** The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2020, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- Continue efforts to maintain and increase the number of students from historically underrepresented populations enrolling in and graduating from the program, including underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and males; develop and implement a plan for doing so, incorporating the many elements already in place, such as the work of the Diversity Task Force of Graduate Psychology Students.

- Continue to obtain external research and training grants to support students with higher graduate assistantship stipends, faculty research in greater numbers and with higher impact on the discipline, and quality services to the community and state, through partnerships with community, state, and national organizations.

- Increase the number of school-based practicum sites that enroll students from diverse backgrounds by recruiting more school psychologists from schools that enroll diverse populations to serve as field supervisors.

- Continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program improvements and document how that has been addressed.
## Comparative Data: S.S.P. in School Psychology (d2.2805)

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