

Responding to Diversity: Recruiting School Psychologists

For the 21st Century

Caroline H. Wandle, Ph.D, NCSP

Jessica Brandt, M.A.

Tufts University

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This study investigated the opinions of a broad group of school psychology graduate students about key aspects of recruitment and retention to identify promising strategies. Research around such strategies from the perspective of graduate students, the consumers of these strategies, may inform policy and practice in essential ways and enhance the continuing dialogue between faculty and students around diversity issues.

Three research questions were examined: Do students rate factors leading to their decision to attend a program in a similar way as to their decision to remain in a program? Do students who identify themselves as being members of diverse groups look at the six climate factors identified in the study differently from students who do not identify themselves as being members of diverse groups? Do students from different ethnic and racial minority groups look at climate differently from each other?

Method

The study investigated the opinions of school psychology graduate students about their decision to attend (recruitment issues) and stay (retention issues) using an online questionnaire that was composed of three parts: a quantitative survey section, a qualitative open-ended section and a demographic section. Twenty-eight survey questions were developed from the literature on recruitment and retention of culturally and linguistically diverse students in both professional and school psychology. Confirmatory factor analysis using principal components with varimax rotation identified 12 factors, one each for decision to attend and decision to stay for the following 6 areas: general program climate; learning experience; personal support to students; systems level support to students; faculty characteristics; and, classmate characteristics. Responses were

received from 540 graduate students. Of those reporting gender, 9.7% were male while 90.3% were female, For those reporting ethnicity, 5.6% were African American, 5.3% were Hispanic, 3.2% were multiracial, 3.0% were Asian American, 1.9% indicated they were members of other groups, 0.4% were Native Americans and 80.6% were Caucasian.

Results

The responses of minority and non-minority students comparing the six attend factors with the six stay factors were examined separately using paired sample T-tests. No significant differences were found in the ratings. An independent groups T-test was used to compare the responses of minority students with those of non-minority students on each of the twelve factors. There was a significant difference between the groups on five of the twelve factors including Learning (stay), Faculty (attend and stay), Personal support (stay) and System support (stay) ($p < .05$). However, in each case, non-minority students agreed significantly more than minority students that these factors impacted their decision. The five factors that were found to have significant differences between non-minority and minority responses were further evaluated using an analysis of variance to examine the differences in response between the three largest minority group respondents, Black/African American, Asian/Asian American and Hispanic. There were no significant differences found among any of the groups on any of the factors included.

Discussion

In regard to the first research question, students rated factors leading to their decision to attend a program similarly to their decision to remain in a program with no significant differences found for students from minority or non-minority groups. For this group of students, then, decisions around factors relating to recruitment and to retention in a program appear to remain consistent. In regard to the second question, the ratings of minority and non-minority group students differed significantly on 5 of the 12 factors. In each case, the non-minority students agreed more strongly than did the minority group students that the factor in question influenced their decision to attend or to stay in a

program. Finally, in relation to the third research question, no significant differences were found among the ratings of students from the three largest ethnic and racial groups, noted above on the twelve factors.

Qualitative responses suggest that for many students, the most influential issue in deciding to attend a program is location, a factor outside the control of school psychology program. Notably, 27% of non-minority students and 26% of minority students cited this as the most influential factor. Aside from location, the most frequently mentioned areas included program reputation for 27% of the non-minority students and 19% of the minority students and training model for 19% of both groups. Only 9% of the non-minority and 10% of the minority students reported that financial consideration such as tuition was the most important factor. Issues of climate and diversity were reported more frequently by minority students as impacting their decision than by non-minority students. Additionally, many students including 39% of the non-minority students and 23% of the minority students were unaware of the recruiting efforts of their program, while 15% of the non-minority students and 25% of the minority students noted that no active recruitment activities occurred.

The findings of this study suggest that programs need to more actively recruit all students, and most importantly students from diverse backgrounds through the use of strategies such as highlighting the reputation of the program, the backgrounds and research interests of faculty in relation to diversity and the training model of the program infused with diversity. Personal and system support that address issues of diversity continue to be important to all students. It is notable that many students were unaware of strategies used or reported that their programs did not actively recruit students from diverse groups.

The complete presentation is available from Caroline Wandle at chwandle.comcast.net.