



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

The ‘Extracurricular Activities’ of a Future School Psychologist

Our diverse university programs provide us with the thorough background in education and psychology necessary for a successful future in the field of school psychology. In order to become significant contributors to our evolving field, however, we each must add some of the key ingredients to our own “recipe” for success by conscientiously and continuously investing in our own professional development. Our ultimate goal, of course, is to evolve into well-rounded and professional individuals—this makes us more marketable and attractive candidates for practicum, internship, and employment opportunities. However, an infinite variety of options is available to us as we search for ways to supplement our academic experience and evolve along our own unique trajectories. This fact sheet is designed to stimulate your own process of reflection and to assist you in your efforts to become a more experienced, well-rounded *you*. In other words, the following are recommendations—not requirements.

Ongoing opportunities and responsibilities for graduate students include participating in research projects; presenting and volunteering at local, state, and national conventions; seeking out professional development in education and school psychology; maintaining active involvement in local student activities; and conducting thorough proactive research into potential practicum and internship sites. At the very least, however, it may be useful to give some serious thought to *exploring your personal interests, contributing to a cause or community, seeking out school-based experience, or adding an area specialty*. Discuss these ideas with your advisor, practicum/internship supervisor, fellow students, friends, and family as a way of identifying your strengths, skills, needs, and unique ways that you might contribute to others. An added benefit of these discussions could be building a stronger sense of community and increased awareness of locally available options for personal development.

Explore Your Personal Interests

Considering the substantial focus and time school psychology graduate students invest in their studies, the years during graduate school may not seem to be the best time to explore personal interests that may appear unrelated to your future work as a school psychologist. However, potential employers may view you more favorably if they sense that you have attempted to maintain a balance between school, home, and work. While our professional lives sustain us, reward our intellectual curiosity, and allow us to make powerful contributions to the lives of students, our passions, hobbies, and pastimes define us in a different way. They also provide relief from what can be a stressful profession. So what are you passionate about? Whether it is

film, architecture, organic farming, quilting, sports, music, carpentry, poetry, tropical fish, or baking, think about how these interests may be explored, developed, or expanded upon. This goal might be achieved via studying, teaching, traveling, performing, leading tours, forming clubs...or by simply recognizing how essential these activities are and making more time for them.

Contribute to a Cause or Community

Supporting worthy causes with our time, interest, and energy allows us to get to know others in our communities, thereby strengthening social cohesion and our understanding of the communities in which we live and work. By encouraging others to do the same, we create a ripple effect that inevitably benefits entire communities. Nevertheless, the decision of how to serve can be a bewildering one. Opportunities are nearly limitless: fundraising for international relief efforts, coaching a Special Olympics team, teaching English to adult second language learners, supporting historic preservation, offering foster care to sheltered pets, and so on.

If improving the lives of families in one's community is your goal, then school social workers may serve as a useful initial resource. They regularly refer families to support services and agencies that desperately need committed volunteers. However, the key is to find a cause you are passionate about, and to which you can develop a *lasting* commitment. These committed relationships are the seeds of long-term social change.

Seek Out School-Based Experience

School psychology programs vary widely with respect to the amount of in-school experience they provide to students. Internship sites may hesitate to accept a student without sufficient school-based experience. This situation can be prevented first by getting an early start on your research into the requirements for your internship sites of interest. Regardless of such requirements, additional experience in schools can help you become not only a more experienced and well-rounded candidate, but also a committed and motivated learner. Look for opportunities such as:

- Working with students at different academic levels (e.g., pre-school, elementary, middle school, and high school).
- Observing or assisting in a wide range of settings (e.g., learning disabled, life-skills, severely handicapped, emotionally disturbed).
- Conducting a needs assessment and establishing a program based on the identified needs of a school.
- Providing supervision or support to a school club or committee.
- Writing a grant proposal.

Add an Area of Specialty

As we make our way toward entering the field, we often identify topics, skills, or procedures that we would like to know more about. These may be areas that have not been addressed in our coursework, new interests that have developed along the way, or needs identified during initial work in schools. They often reflect our determination to enhance our skills. Examples might include:

- Learning a second language.
- Understanding low-incidence disabilities.
- Researching or implementing innovative prevention programs.
- Improving consultation skills.
- Meeting the needs of gifted students.
- Effectively utilizing available supervision, or becoming a competent and thoughtful mentor/supervisor.

What Next?

Now that you have some ideas for creating balance in your life, consider creating your own personal development plan. If our initial work in schools teaches us anything, it is that goals without clear objectives and a realistic timeline are unlikely to be achieved. Scheduling ourselves into our own busy lives may be necessary; setting aside time to both work towards and evaluate personal goals will ultimately ensure success. Strong graduate programs help us to develop a sense of commitment to students and to the field of school psychology. In order to fulfill that commitment, however, we must also reflect on whether we have developed a strong commitment to ourselves. Our success, both professionally and personally, will depend on it.

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