FIRST STEPS IN PLANNING A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND

As with most endeavors, careful planning is an important part of starting a school psychology program. A strong foundation will likely better assure the ultimate success of the program, but building that foundation takes time and effort.

For the following recommendations, it is assumed that the need for the program has already been established, as has university and/or department support. So, what might be some steps to planning the program? The following are suggested:

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Close follow NASP/APA training standards.
  If the program is to be at the specialist level, then it is highly recommended that NASP standards for specialist level programs be used to guide program development. Those standards may be found at: http://www.nasponline.org/standards/approvedtraining/training_program.aspx

  If the program is to be at the doctoral level, then it is advisable to set a goal of meeting both NASP and APA standards. APA standards are available at: http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/

  Credentialing by many state departments of education and national certification are linked to NASP approval, whereas state board of psychology licensure is typically linked more closely to APA accreditation. However, because NASP affords APA-accredited school psychology programs that meet NASP internship requirements a streamlined route to achieving NASP approval, new doctoral programs are advised to look toward achieving APA accreditation but also meeting NASP standards, especially those for internships.

• Consider seeking consultation for program development.
  Programs that expect to eventually seek NASP and/or APA accreditation should consider obtaining consultation from a professional familiar with the requirements of the particular organization early in the program development process. This is probably best done after program policies, curriculum, internship options, and assessments have been drafted but before they have been implemented.
Plan for state approval.
State approval will likely be critical if not required for student recruitment and career opportunities after graduation, and thus should be an important consideration in program planning. Some states provide provisional or temporary approval to a new program that meets particular programmatic and curriculum requirements until that program can demonstrate outcomes. Thirty-one states have NCATE Partnership agreements that rely on NCATE and its affiliated Specialized Professional Associations (in the case of school psychology programs, NASP) to review and approve programs. A list of NCATE Partnership states and types of reviews can be found at:

Because the demonstration of outcomes in at least one cohort of graduates is needed to achieve NASP Conditional Approval, states that require NASP review and approval typically have available some type of provisional approval that can be granted until the program qualifies to be reviewed by NASP.

Ensure an adequate faculty in school psychology.
Faculty are the main foundation of all school psychology programs. To meet NASP and APA accreditation standards, it is important to have at least two faculty with primary doctoral preparation and specialization in school psychology (preferably from an APA-accredited program if the planned program will be at the doctoral level) and who are active in school psychology as a profession, and at least one FTE faculty in an allied area. One of the faculty with school psychology specialization should be designated as program director. The program may consider establishing an advisory board of program faculty, faculty in allied fields, and representatives of local school districts where students might eventually complete supervised field experience to help plan aspects of the program. Such a group could be very helpful to evaluating the program, making suggestions, and advocating for resources.

Ensure that a degree in school psychology or other form of institutional documentation will be awarded upon completion of the program.
An obvious but fundamental question to address is whether the program will be at the specialist level (the minimum required for national certification and certification in the great majority of states) or doctoral level, and what will be the culminating degree. If the program is at the specialist level, it may be beneficial for recruitment to issue an educational specialist degree (if in a college of education) or specialist in school psychology or similar degree (if in a college of arts and sciences or similar college). Other alternatives are to issue a master’s degree at the end of the program or to issue a master’s upon completion of coursework and then a certificate of advanced graduate study (CAGS) later. Regardless of the degree offered, it is very important that a degree, CAGS, or some other institutional documentation of program completion be issued or documented on transcripts upon completion of the entire program, including the internship.

Develop policies, curriculum, clinical and field experiences, and performance assessments.
Initial planning of the program should focus on admissions, curriculum, clinical and field experiences, and performance assessment. NASP and APA standards should help guide planning in these areas. In addition to those standards, resources and information may be found through the NASP and APA websites, through Internet searches of existing accredited programs and materials, and through requests for information from model programs and via school psychology faculty electronic mailing lists. You can subscribe to the Trainers in School Psychology (TSP) listserv by e-mailing LISTSERV@LSV.UKY.EDU with the text of SUB SPTRAIN. Because programs put considerable time and resources into developing such materials as program handbooks and assessments, broad requests for people to simply send samples aren’t nearly as effective a method as requests from individuals accompanied by an assurance that permission will be sought and credit will be given for any program materials that are “borrowed.”
Engage in professional development helpful for program development and evaluation.

NASP, TSP, and APA national conferences are particularly good sources of information for new programs, as is the NASP Graduate Education Workgroup. TSP offers institutional membership that includes all faculty and has an annual conference in conjunction with the NASP convention. The NASP convention always includes sessions or workshops on graduate education issues, including preparation on how to seek NASP approval (a session that is highly recommended for directors and faculty of new programs that plan to seek NASP approval). One good way to become familiar with NASP standards and review processes is to volunteer to become a NASP program reviewer. Professionals can nominate themselves to be reviewers through the chair of the NASP Program Approval Board.

Hopefully, careful planning during initial program development will lead to a more successful program and more effective graduates.