RECRUITING THE BEST CANDIDATES BY ENHANCING PROGRAM VISIBILITY

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BACKGROUND

Perhaps nothing is more critical to the success of a school psychology program than the candidates it admits. Recruiting, selecting, and admitting the “best” students possible (with “best” being defined by each individual program) often takes considerable time, but it is time well spent. This is for many obvious reasons, but two are primary. First, it increases the prospect of graduating the “best” school psychologists. Second, it helps prevent faculty having to devote consider time in the future to resolving problems that might have been avoided (e.g., poor grades, lack of professional qualities, misunderstandings about the program’s goals and philosophy) if only more time had been devoted to effective recruitment, selection, and admission of candidates. The focus of this brief is on the former—recruitment.

In recruiting potential candidates, successful programs make themselves visible in a number of ways. The following are some recommendations for doing so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop a program website.**
  This is perhaps the most valuable means of helping recruit applicants. The website should present a clear and thorough description of the program, including the application process, the program curriculum, field experiences, the interests and research of faculty, and specific program strengths (e.g., funding, diversity, faculty achievements, national accreditation). The website might also introduce prospective applicants to the profession of school psychology by describing the roles and functions of school psychologists and providing links to the NASP and other websites for more information.

- **Use other forms of media, such as brochures, advertisements, and news articles about your programs.**
  For example, advertise in the *Communique*; other newsletters, especially the newsletter of your state’s association for school psychologists; and in local newspapers. Also, promote your program via news articles about research projects, achievements, and services offered.

- **Be sure to list your program in the NASP database of programs and the APA publication “Graduate Study in Psychology.”**
  Note that the APA publication includes both specialist and doctoral programs in school psychology (regardless where your program is housed at your university).
Visit other campuses to present about school psychology and your program. Particular attention should be given to undergraduate colleges and universities without a school psychology program. For example, present at a Psi Chi meeting or to psychology and education classes. To increase diversity in your program, you might want to make a special effort to present at, and/or send materials to, institutions that enroll large numbers of historically underrepresented students.

Present about school psychology at local high schools, such as to psychology classes for juniors and seniors.

Present research and best practices in school psychology at local, state, regional, national, and international conferences. Such presentations would be not only by faculty, but also graduate students.

Present training workshops for teachers, school counselors, and others who might be interested in entering the profession of school psychology.

Attend and present information about your program at job search fairs on college campuses.

Encourage publications by faculty and graduate students. These would include journal articles, book chapters, books, articles in newsletters, fact sheets, handouts, articles on the Web, and more.

Promote the active involvement among faculty, graduate students, and program graduates in professional associations in school psychology. Serving in position of leadership should especially be encouraged.

Encourage current students and alumni to promote the program and help recruit potential applicants.

Invite prospective applicants to visit the campus. Perhaps offer an “open house” day or luncheon, giving potential applicants an opportunity to learn more about the program and meet faculty and candidates in the program.

SOME IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER

A 2006 survey of graduate students conducted by the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals (http://www.nagap.org/downloads/RecruitingSurveyReport.pdf) reported that the following factors were important to them in selecting which program to attend:

- Location – 49.7%
- Program’s academic reputation – 38%
- Specific faculty – 18.6%
- Cost – 18.2%
- Program’s specific emphasis – 17%
- Degree offered – 14.7%
- Research projects – 11.2%
- Financial assistance – 11.0%

The survey was not specific to school psychology. It is very likely that that students choose those school psychology programs that are NASP and/or APA approved and that offer graduate assistantships.
Given the above findings, in addition to the above recommendations for spreading the word about the program, you might also want to do the following:

- **If your program is NASP and/or APA approved, make this clear to potential applicants. If not approved, seek approval as soon as possible.**

- **In promoting your program, highlight the following:**
  - The attractiveness of the program’s location (e.g., its convenience to potential local applicants and/or the qualities of geographical area or city).
  - The qualities of the faculty, especially their research, service to the profession, and experiences in teaching and school psychology.
  - Financial assistance that might be provided, such as assistantships. If the university waives the application fee for certain students, such as McNair Scholars or students with financial needs, make that known as well.
  - Particular areas of emphases and strengths of your program.