NASP Report of Graduate Education in School Psychology: 2015–2016

Daniel L. Gadke
Mississippi State University; NASP Graduate Education Committee

Sarah Valley-Gray
NOVA Southeastern University; NASP Graduate Education Committee

Eric Rossen
National Association of School Psychologists

Kathleen McNamara, PhD, Editor
Cleveland State University

Jeffrey L. Charvat, PhD, Coeditor
National Association of School Psychologists

ABSTRACT

The National School Psychology Program Database Survey is an annual initiative of the Graduate Education Committee of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). While NASP has periodically collected data regarding graduate education in school psychology since the mid-1970s, data have been collected annually for both specialist and doctoral school psychology programs since 2010. The collection of these data aims to provide transparency regarding the status of graduate education in school psychology, inform the profession regarding emerging trends, and provide prospective students and other stakeholders with information regarding school psychology graduate programs. This report summarizes the data received from the directors of school psychology programs during the 2015–2016 academic year and provides estimates for selected outcomes for all programs. An estimated 9,797 current students (including interns) were enrolled in school psychology programs. Further, an estimated 3,003 first year students were enrolled, whereas an estimated 2,580 students (2,026 specialist-level; 554 doctoral-level) graduated. Additional data include information regarding credit hour requirements, financial support, enrollment, internship placement, and student outcomes.

The National Association of School Psychologists has periodically collected data regarding graduate education in the United States since the mid-1970s, allowing for the monitoring of trends that impact the health of school psychology. These data capture changes in enrollment, program availability, student outcomes, access to financial aid, and shifts in graduate education requirements. Since 2010, annual data collection has resulted in the generation of an online, publically accessible database (NASP, n.d.) to systematically track data related to graduate education and to assist prospective school psychology graduate students in the application process (see Gadke, Valley-Gray, & Rossen, 2016). These data also

allow for the generation of annual reports, thereby offering a snapshot of graduate education data in school psychology. The survey process also meets a long-term goal of regularly tracking data to allow for more detailed trend analysis in the future. Prior to the annual report provided by Gadke et al. (2016), Rossen and von der Embse (2014) provided a historical report of the data available up to 2014.

The current paper provides a summary of selected data collected from graduate education programs in school psychology for the 2015–2016 academic year. Given the variability in response rate on specific items, estimates for selected outcomes are similarly provided.

METHODS

The National School Psychology Program Database Survey was conducted from April of 2016 through July of 2016.

Participants

During the 2015–2016 academic year, 247 known institutions across the United States offered a graduate education program in school psychology either at the specialist-level, doctoral-level, or both. Directors of programs within the 247 institutions that minimally led to a state school psychology credential during the 2015–2016 academic year received e-mail invitations to complete the survey. Across all known institutions, there are 321 programs; 220 at the specialist-level and 101 at the doctoral-level. Response rates from programs vary by survey question. Specifically, response rates for individual items ranged from 25% to 100%. Only programs that provided complete data within a given area of the survey (e.g., credit hours, enrollment) were included in the analyses. In an effort to have an estimate of the total number of all students, male students, minority-status students, first-year students, and graduates from all U.S. school psychology programs during the 2015–2016 academic year, these data were extrapolated from available information in each of these domains. The extrapolation required multiplying the average by all known active school psychology programs in the United States.

Measure

The National School Psychology Program Database Survey is an annual survey delivered to directors of both specialist and doctoral programs in school psychology. Respondents provide information across a number of domains, including the nature of programs offered, approval/accreditation status, student financial support information, enrollment information, faculty appointments, opportunities for respecialization, internship placements, and student outcome data. The database can be accessed at http://apps.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/graduate-education/index.aspx.

Procedure

All known school psychology program directors were contacted via e-mail with instructions regarding how to complete the national survey using a Web-based portal through the NASP website. Multiple attempts were made to encourage participation in the survey. Frequent e-mail messages were distributed via the Trainers of School Psychologists (TSP) Listserv, including providing a list of program completers. Individual e-mail messages were sent and telephone calls were made to program directors reminding them to complete the survey. The portal provided directors with direct access to enter and edit their programs' data on the NASP website, along with the option to provide access to other individuals within the institution to complete the survey. All directors were also provided with detailed instructions regarding

how to access their program information and how to complete the survey. Once the survey was completed, the portal was closed to program directors and uploaded to the NASP database. For the purposes of data analysis, data were uploaded into a single file and cleaned for missing information, notable outliers, and other response errors. Microsoft Excel was utilized for all analyses.

RESULTS

Data were reported based on program type (i.e., specialist and doctoral) across each of the variables assessed within the survey. For the purpose of this annual report, results focused on program approval and accreditation, credit hour requirements, financial support, enrollment, internship placements, and student outcomes. Additionally, available data were used to extrapolate enrollment estimates for all known U.S. school psychology programs.

Program Approval and Accreditation

A detailed description of reported program approval by NASP and accreditation by the American Psychological Association (APA) can be found in Table 1. Note that the APA accredits only doctoral-level programs.

Table 1. Number of Approved and Accredited School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016

	Specialist	Doctoral
NASP		
Approved	145 (66%)	71 (70%)
Approval with Conditions	19 (9%)	1 (1%)
Not Approved	56 (25%)	29 (29%)
APA		
Accredited	--	70 (69%)
Not Accredited	--	31 (31%)
Total	220	101

Note. There were 247 institutions offering a total of 321 programs (many institutions offered more than one program on the same campus).

Overall, 220 specialist-level programs participated in this portion of the survey. Of these programs, 145 (66%) reported full NASP program approval, 19 (9%) reported NASP program approval with conditions, while 56 (25%) were not approved at the time of data collection. Among the 101 participating doctoral programs, 71 (70%) held full NASP approval, one reported NASP approval with conditions, and 29 (29%) doctoral programs were not approved by NASP. Further, 70 out of the 101 doctoral programs reported accreditation by the American Psychological Association, which only accredits doctoral-level programs.

Credit Hours

A detailed description of the range and average number of credit hours required for graduation can be found in Table 2. A total of 174 specialist-level programs reported data regarding credit hours required for degree completion. Of those reporting, 167 indicated being on a semester system, while seven programs

Table 2. Number of Credit Hours Required for Graduation in School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016 by Program Approval and Accreditation Status

Programs	Specialist			Doctoral		
	NASP Program Status					
	n	x̄ (hours)	Range	n	x̄ (hours)	Range
Approved	127	69.6	60–72	61	112.4	60–160
Not Approved	30	67.9	62–72	22	99.9	48–145
Approved with Conditions	17	69.8	67–72	1	90	--
Total	174	69.3	60–72	84	108.9	48–160
	APA Program Status					
	n	x̄ (hours	Range	n	x̄ (hours)	Range
Accredited	—	—	—	57	111.1	60–160
Not Accredited	—	—	—	27	104.1	48–145
Total	116	70.5	50–124	84	108.9	48–160

Note. Quarter credit hours were converted to semester credit hours.

indicated being on a quarter system. For the purposes of this analysis, quarter hours were multiplied by 0.67 to convert them to semester hours (see McMaster, Reschly, & Peters, 1989; Thomas, 1998).

Overall, the average number of semester hours across all specialist-level programs was 69.3 (n = 174). The average number of credit hours for programs with NASP approval (69.6; n = 127), NASP approval with conditions (69.8; n = 17), and without NASP approval (67.9; n = 30) differed by fewer than two total credits.

The average number of semester hours across all doctoral programs was 108.8 (n = 84). The average number of hours for NASP-approved doctoral programs was 112.4 (n = 61), whereas those without NASP approval averaged 99.9 hours (n = 22). The one reporting doctoral program that maintained NASP approval with conditions reported 90 semester hours. Doctoral programs with APA accreditation averaged 111.1 hours (n = 57), whereas those without APA accreditation averaged 104.1 semester hours (n = 27).

Financial Support

Table 3 provides a summary of the data collected on financial support for students during their graduate education. For the purposes of this survey, financial support includes any form of monetary assistance, including federal aid, student loans, and funds provided by the academic program.

Across 55 reported specialist programs, 303 first-year students (5.5 per program) and 663 students across all years (12 per program) received funding to complete their graduate education. For the purposes of this survey, funding includes any form of monetary assistance, which may consist of federal aid, student loans, or monetary assistance by the academic program. On average, students employed in a work-study position, which may include graduate or teaching assistantships, completed 12.5 work hours per week (n = 46 programs).

Table 3. School Psychology Students Receiving Financial Support During the 2015–2016 Academic Year

	Specialist				Doctoral			
	Programs (n)	Students (n)	$\bar{x}$	Range	Programs (n)	Students (n)	$\bar{x}$	Range
1st Years [a]	55	303	--	--	70	342	--	--
All Years [a]	55	663	--	--	69	1,297	--	--
Min. Weekly GA/TA Hours	46	--	12.5	2–20	69	--	13.5	2–20

[a] Includes students receiving any form of monetary assistance through Federal Student Financial Aid or student loans, or any form of monetary assistance from the academic program (e.g., teaching or research assistantships).

Similarly, 70 doctoral programs reported that a total of 342 first-year students (an average of 4.9 per program) received funding, while 69 doctoral programs reported that 1,297 students (18.8 per program) received funding throughout their graduate training. Students enrolled in doctoral programs and employed in a work-study position (e.g., graduate or teaching assistantships) were required to work a minimum of 13.5 weekly hours, on average, in 69 reporting programs.

Enrollment

Student enrollment data for specialist and doctoral programs are presented in Table 4. During the 2015–2016 academic year, 178 specialist-level program directors reported an average of 31.0 students enrolled per program (n = 5,524 students). Of these students, 13.7% (an average of 4.3 per program, or 756 students) were male, and 25.3% (an average of 8.0 per program, or 1,398 students) were reported as being of minority status. An average of 10.9 students per program (total n = 1,915) were in their first year of study, according to directors of 178 specialist-level programs. Directors of 169 specialist-level programs reported an average of 36.1 (n = 6,107) applicants per program, while 176 specialist-level program directors reported accepting an average of 8.8 new students per program (n = 1,543).

Table 4. Student Enrollment in School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016

Students	Specialist (n = 178 programs)				Doctoral (n = 91programs)			
	n	$\bar{x}$	%	Range	n	$\bar{x}$	%	Range
Total	5,524	31.0	--	2–125	2,677	29.4	--	1–100
Males	756	4.3	13.7%	0–18	466	5.1	17.4%	0–19
First Year	1,915	10.9	34.7%	0–43	532	5.9	19.9%	0–36
Minority	1,398	8.0	25.3%	0–53	705	7.7	25.4%	0–45
Accepted	1,543[a]	8.8	--	0–32	492[c]	5.6	--	0–24
Applicants	6,107[b]	36.1	--	0–136	2,942[d]	34.6	--	0–199

Note. The data reported do not represent all known programs in school psychology, and thus do not describe the entire enrollment in school psychology graduate programs.
[a]n = 176 programs reporting; [b]n = 169 programs reporting; [c]n = 88 programs reporting; [d]n = 84 programs reporting

Directors of 91 doctoral programs reported an average of 29.4 students enrolled per program (n = 2,677 students). Of these students, 17.4% (an average of 5.1 per program, or 466 students) were males, while

25.4% (an average of 7.7, or 705 students) were reported to be of minority status. An average of 5.9 students (n = 532) were in their first year of study. Finally, 84 program directors reported an average of 34.6 applications for admission (n = 2,942), while 88 programs reported an average of 5.6 students accepted per program (n = 492).

There was considerable inconsistency in the numbers of program directors responding to each of the items in the survey. In order to obtain an estimate of the total number of all students, male students, minority-status students, first-year students, and graduates across the entire nation during the 2015–2016 academic year, these data were extrapolated from available information in each of these domains (see Table 7). The extrapolation required multiplying the averages from each individual domain (e.g., male students) by all known active school psychology programs in the United States. Based on this analysis, an estimated 6,827 specialist-level students and 2,970 doctoral-level students were enrolled in school psychology programs across the United States in 2015–2016, for a total of 9,797 students. Within specialist-level programs, there were an estimated 946 male students (13.9% of all students), 1,757 students of minority status (25.7% of all students), and 2,406 in their first year of the program (35.2% of all students). Within doctoral programs, there were an estimated 517 male students (17.4% of all students), 781 students of minority status (26.3% of all students), and 596 students in their first year of the program (20% of all students). Finally, it is estimated that there were 2,026 graduates of specialist programs and 554 graduates of doctoral programs, for a total of 2,580 new graduates entering the workforce at the conclusion of the 2015–2016 academic year.

Internship Placement

A summary of the student internship data for specialist and doctoral programs is displayed in Table 5. Results from 180 reporting specialist-level programs indicated an average of 8.8 interns per program (total n = 1,578) during the 2015–2016 academic year. Of these interns, 98.1% (n = 1,547) completed the

Table 5. Internships in School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016

Internship Data				
	Specialist Students (n = 180 programs)			
Interns	n	$\bar{x}$	%	Range
Total	1,578	8.8	--	0–33
100% School Based	1,547	8.6	98.1%	0–33
	Doctoral Students (n = 68 programs)			
	n	$\bar{x}$	%	Range
Total	422	6.2	--	0–24
100% School Based	207	3.0	49.0%	0–14
Part-Time School	146	2.2	34.6%	0–24
100% Out of School	111	1.6	26.3%	0–16
APA Accredited	161	2.4	38.2%	0–24
APPIC and CDSPP	61	0.9	14.4%	0–6
APPIC Only	13	0.2	3.1%	0–6
CDSPP Only	156	2.3	37.0%	0–18
Non-APPIC/CDSPP Criteria Not Met	54	0.8	12.8%	0–12

entirety of their internship in a school setting. Doctoral programs presented a more diverse set of internship placements. Across the 68 reporting doctoral programs there was an average of 6.2 interns per program (n = 422). Slightly less than half of these students (49.0%; $\bar{x}$= 3.0; n = 207) completed an entirely school-based internship; 34.6% ($\bar{x}$= 2.2; n = 146) were part-time in the schools; and 26.3% ($\bar{x}$= 1.6; n = 111) completed the entirety of their internship in a setting outside of the schools.

Student Outcomes

Student outcomes refer to students' graduation rates and time to graduation. Specific student outcome data can be found in Table 6, while estimates regarding graduation outcomes for all known programs can be found in Table 7.

Table 6. Graduation Rates in School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016

	Specialist Programs				Doctoral Programs			
Outcome	*n* (programs)	*n* (students)	$\bar{x}$	Range	*n* (programs)	*n* (students)	$\bar{x}$	Range
Students Graduated	154	1,419	9.2	0 - 56	76	417	5.5	0–28
Median Years to Degree Completion	146	--	3.1	2 - 5	69	--	5.4	3–10

There was significant variability in meeting professional accrediting and approval criteria for doctoral-level internships. In the 68 doctoral programs reporting data, 38.2% of students (n = 161) completed an internship accredited by the American Psychological Association; 3.1% of students (n = 13) completed an internship at sites that were members of the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC); and 14.4% of students (n = 61) completed an internship in sites that were both APPIC members and met the Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs (CDSPP) internship guidelines. Further, 37.0% of students (n = 156) completed a program that met only the CDSPP guidelines, while 12.8% of students (n = 54) completed an internship that did not meet any accreditation/approval guidelines.

Across 154 reporting specialist programs, 1,419 students (an average of 9.2 per program) graduated during the 2015–2016 academic year. Of these 154 programs, 146 program directors reported a median of 3.1 years to degree completion for candidates enrolled in specialist-level programs. Doctoral programs (n =

Table 7. Estimates of Enrollment in School Psychology Programs in 2015–2016

	Specialist Programs	Doctoral Programs
Students	*n* (estimation)	*n* (estimation)
Total Students	6,826.6	2,970.4
Males Students	946.0	517.1
First Year Students	2,406.8	596.9
Minority Students	1,757.8	781.7
Graduated	2,026.2	554.5

Note. Estimates were calculated using known number of specialist and doctoral level programs and the average number of students admitted and enrolled by programs that completed the survey.

76) reported 417 graduating students (an average of 5.5 per program) during the 2015–2016 academic year. Of these 76 programs, 69 program directors reported a median of 5.4 years required for degree completion.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Data reported for the 2015–2016 academic year include information on program credit hour requirements, financial support offered to students, enrollment status, internship placement, and student outcomes. While specialist-level programs reported fairly consistent numbers of required credit hours (ranging from 60 to 72 hours), doctoral programs were more variable, with a range from 48 to 160 hours. There are several possible explanations for the variability among the doctoral programs. First, programs that report fewer required credit hours may accept credit for students' previous graduate education experiences. For example, students may be exempt from graduate coursework that already was completed in a previous specialist-level school psychology program, or in a master's degree program in a related discipline. Further, some institutions that have both specialist- and doctoral-level programs may have reported the credit hour range across both programs rather than separately for each degree type. Finally, it seems likely that required hours for practica and internships account for significant differences among programs. Nevertheless, there is significant variability in the reported number of credit hours by coordinators of graduate programs in school psychology, which may have implications for students pursing the degree in terms of time and cost.

Recently, Rossen and von der Embse (2014) analyzed credit hour data from 1982, 1988, and 1997. Specialist programs reported an average of 63, 66, and 68 required credit hours, while doctoral programs reported 91, 101, and 106 required credit hours, respectively, during those years. The previous NASP database report (Gadke et al., 2016) suggested a slight increase with an average of 71 required credit hours from specialist programs and 113 from doctoral programs. The current data represent a slight decrease, with average required hours for specialist and doctoral programs of 69.3 and 108.9, respectively. This difference across the year can likely be attributed to an increase in the response rate, rather than an emerging trend. Note that the 2014–2015 academic year survey (see Gadke et al., 2016) reported data for 116 specialist and 75 doctoral programs; however, for the current year's survey (2015–2016), data were reported for 174 specialist and 84 doctoral programs.

With respect to financial aid, doctoral students seem more likely to receive support than those enrolled in specialist-level programs. Given that the reported number of students funded in the years following their first year is greater than the reported number of first year students funded alone, it is likely that many programs at least maintain support as students move through the program. Additionally, in order to receive support, the survey data indicate that both specialist-level and doctoral students participate in graduate or teaching assistantships that require a range of 2 to 20 hours per week. Similarly to the preceding year's report (Gadke et al., 2016), these data appear more favorable than in previous studies, particularly for specialist-level students (See Rossen & von der Embse, 2014).

Consistent with previous years, there are significantly more female students then male students enrolled in both specialist-level and doctoral programs, accounting for more than 80% of enrollment across both program types. Notably, only 13.7% of specialist-level students were male, whereas 17.4% of doctoral students identified as male. This is consistent with estimates that males comprise 16% of the school psychology workforce (Walcott, Charvat, McNamara, & Hyson, 2015). Additionally, specialist-level and doctoral programs reported approximately one quarter of their enrolled students were of minority status, which far exceeds the estimated diversity of the workforce, with 87% identifying as White (Walcott et al., 2015).

Interestingly, for both specialist and doctoral programs, a greater number of applicants was reported, but fewer were accepted than in prior surveys. During the 2014–2015 academic year, programs reported an average of 33.9 specialist applicants and 32.1 doctoral applicants (see Gadke et al., 2016). For 2015–2016, those numbers were 36.1 and 34.6 for specialist and doctoral programs, respectively, marking an increase in the number of program applications. Importantly, some of these students may apply to but not be accepted by multiple programs, possibly inflating these data. That said, in 2014–2015, an average of 13.8 specialist and 10.0 doctoral students were accepted into programs; in contrast, for the 2015–2016 year, an average of 8.8 specialist and 5.6 doctoral students were accepted. This is particularly surprising given more programs reporting data for the current year than for the 2014–2015. Nevertheless, given the critical shortage of professionals within school psychology, a concerted effort to identify and link qualified students to open positions in school psychology graduate programs is crucial. It is unclear whether students who are not admitted apply again the following year or select a different career path. The 2nd Round Candidate Match (https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/becoming-a-school-psychologist/2nd-round-candidate-match), which provides a list of programs with remaining openings following the standard admission cycle, is one step to provide admission opportunities for prospective students.

In general, the data suggest that nearly all specialist-level students complete their internships entirely in school settings. Internship settings are considerably more varied in nature for doctoral students, however. Approximately half of all doctoral interns complete the entirety of their internship year in a school setting; some students may complete only a portion of their internship in the schools; and over a quarter complete their entire internship in a setting outside of the schools. Nearly 40% of doctoral interns complete the internship year in a setting accredited by the American Psychological Association, while nearly 55% complete an internship in a setting that meets the APPIC or CDSPP guidelines or both. Approximately 13% percent of doctoral interns complete the culminating year in a setting that meets none of these criteria.

Unfortunately, not all program directors responded to the survey, nor did they complete the survey in its entirety. Using an extrapolation method among all known programs in school psychology, an estimated 9,797 total students, including interns (6,827 or 70% specialist-level; 2,970 or 30% doctoral-level) were enrolled in a school psychology program during the 2015–2016 academic year. Additionally, an estimated 2,026 students graduated from specialist programs and 554 students graduated from doctoral programs during the 2015–2016 academic year, providing a total of 2,580 new graduates entering the workforce. This figure suggests relative stability in the number of new graduates based on reported interns from previous years (i.e., a proxy for those likely to graduate the following year); with 2,604 reported interns in 2010–2011, 2,523 interns in 2012–2013, and 2,586 interns in 2013–2014 (Rossen & von der Embse, 2014).

LIMITATIONS

These data, while presenting only an overview of the current status of graduate preparation in school psychology in the United States, should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. The greatest limitation is related to reporting methods. Programs were inconsistent as to how they reported certain data. For example, when some programs wanted to report "0" or "no" they actually wrote those items in the response block; however, it appeared that some programs simply left items blank to reflect "0" and "no." This made it impossible to decipher among those responding in the negative, and those simply not responding for certain survey items. In a similar vein, some program directors gave no responses to entire sections of data or completed only a portion of items. As in last year's survey, if data were missing or appeared to be reported in error, those data were removed from the final data set in an effort to minimize any inaccuracies. Unfortunately, this resulted in an incomplete representation of all current programs, a

circumstance which the authors tried to rectify by extrapolating from available data to obtain estimates for the field as a whole. Finally, given that these data are available to the public at the program level, it is possible that some directors did not report certain data that would potentially reflect poorly on their program, leading to potential selection bias.

The NASP Graduate Education Database serves as a valuable resource to school psychology. In particular, in order to ensure the viability of the profession and effectively address personnel shortages that are the focus of a NASP Key Initiative, it is essential to collect accurate data about school psychology programs and graduates on an ongoing basis so that issues and trends can be monitored over time.

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