

Assessment Outcomes and Changes in the Ph.D. Program in Experimental and Applied Psychological Science

The steering committee of the Experimental and Applied Psychological Science (EAPS) program has recently implemented the following program changes and improvements as a result of ongoing assessment activities. Most importantly, the training objectives of the program have been clarified and the management policies have been more clearly developed in response to the renaming and broadening of the program in March 2008. The broadening and renaming of the program was prompted by changes in focus associated with an influx of new faculty and graduate students in recent years. The changes in the program were based on the need to provide graduate students with more specialized training in particular areas of psychological science than was provided by the former Research and Evaluation Methodology program. As opposed to the former one-track program, the restructured program provides specialized training to students in different emphasis areas. Emphasis areas are composed of groups of faculty and graduate students with interests in a particular area of psychology. Formal emphasis areas now include Behavior Analysis and Research Evaluation Methodology, but additional emphasis areas are expected to emerge in the coming years based on clusters of faculty interests and graduate student admissions.

The change in the program has also led to modifications in how student admissions and student evaluations are conducted. Decisions about student admissions are made by the central program steering committee based on the qualifications of applicants selected by the individual emphasis areas. Similarly, yearly student evaluations are standardized for all students in the program and based on initial assessments by students' faculty mentors and other faculty in an emphasis area.

Assessment of the existing curriculum revealed an overemphasis on methodological training at the expense of breadth of training in core areas of psychology. To balance the curriculum, an additional psychology course (4 rather than 3 of the core areas, such as social psych) was added and four formerly required methodology courses (Qualitative Methods, Advanced Evaluation Methods, Instrument Development and Advanced Measurement Theories and Practice) have become electives. The revised program also permits more flexibility in how students develop a program of study in collaboration with a supervisory committee in order to obtain training in their chosen area of emphasis. Finally, all students now attend a weekly in-depth seminar every semester focused on their chosen area or emphasis. Current seminars provide specialized training in Behavior Analysis, Cognitive Psychology, Health Psychology, and Research Evaluation and Methodology.

Program training objectives and curriculum are reviewed on an ongoing basis by the program steering committee and adjustments are made as required. Student course evaluations are an integral part of this process. In addition, when each student completes the doctoral program, his/her advisor discusses the student's experiences in the program and requests suggestions for improvement. This information is used in subsequent faculty and program steering committee meetings to refine and improve program offerings.