

Standards of Accreditation for Programs in Health Service Psychology

I. Scope of Accreditation

The accreditation process is intended to promote consistent quality and excellence in education and training in health service psychology. Education and training provides tangible benefits for prospective students; the local, national, and international publics that are consumers of psychological services; and the discipline of psychology itself.

For the purposes of accreditation by the APA Commission on Accreditation, “health service psychology” is defined as the integration of psychological science and practice to facilitate human development and functioning.

Programs are accredited to provide training in health service psychology to individuals for preparation that includes work in diverse settings and encompasses a wide range of professional activities, including efforts to increase our understanding of all aspects of human health and well-being, as well as problem prevention, consultation, assessment and intervention.

Individuals who engage in health service psychology have been appropriately trained and credentialed to be eligible for licensure as doctoral-level psychologists.

The Commission reviews programs for accreditation at doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral levels:

A. Scope of Accreditation for Doctoral Programs:

The Commission on Accreditation (CoA) reviews doctoral programs in psychology that provide broad and general training in scientific psychology and in the foundations of practice in health service psychology. Practice areas include clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, and other developed practice areas. The CoA also reviews programs that combine two or three of the above-listed practice areas.

B. Scope of Accreditation for Internship Programs:

The CoA reviews internship training programs in practice areas including clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, and other developed practice areas or in general health service psychology.

C. Scope of Accreditation for Postdoctoral Residency Programs:

The CoA reviews postdoctoral residency programs providing education and training in preparation for health service psychology practice at an advanced level of competency in the major areas that have been defined within the scope of accreditation at the doctoral level, a focus

area that promotes attainment of advanced competencies in a content within one or more of the major areas that have been defined within the scope of accreditation at the doctoral level, or in another recognized specialty practice area in health service psychology.

II. Guiding Principles of Accreditation

The accreditation standards and procedures are greatly influenced by the following principles and practical concerns.

A. The Purpose and Practice of Accreditation

Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental process of self-study and external review intended to evaluate, enhance, and publicly recognize quality in institutions and in programs of higher education. As such, it serves:

1. General, liberal education;
2. Technical, vocational education and training; and
3. Education and training for the professions.

Accreditation is intended to protect the interests of students, benefit the public, and improve the quality of teaching, learning, research, and practice in health service psychology. Through its standards, the accrediting body is expected to encourage dual attainment of a common level of professional competency, and ongoing improvement of educational institutions and training programs, sound educational experimentation, and constructive innovation.

The accreditation process involves judging the degree to which a program has achieved its educational aims, and its students/trainees and graduates have demonstrated adequate mastery of the discipline-specific knowledge and profession-wide competencies. The accreditation body should not explicitly prescribe the processes by which the competency should be reached; rather, it should judge the degree to which a program achieves outcomes consistent with the standards in this document and its training aims.

Thus, accreditation in psychology is intended to: “achieve general agreement on the goals of training ... encourage experimentation on methods of achieving those goals and ... suggest ways of establishing high standards in a setting of flexibility and reasonable freedom².”

2 The APA Committee on Training in Clinical Psychology (1947). First report of the new accreditation process in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 2, 539-558.

B. Professional Values

1. There are certain principles and values that are at the core of the profession and impact the way in which the CoA functions and the decisions it makes. The following overarching values govern the policies, standards, and procedures of the CoA.

a. Quality

The primary goal of the accreditation process is to ensure quality in the education of psychologists. The level of quality necessary for accreditation is determined by a consensus of the stakeholders, including the public, students, faculty, and practitioners, to ensure that students/trainees receive the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required for competent and safe practice. The focus on quality ensures that those most vulnerable in the educational process, students/trainees and the public to whom students/trainees and future psychologists will provide services, are adequately protected.

b. Accountability

The CoA is accountable to its various stakeholders, including students, faculty, supervisors, the general public, and the American Psychological Association, of which the CoA is a part. This means that the CoA expects to be held and holds itself accountable to develop policies, standards, and procedures that are fair, accurate, data-based, and comprehensive, and to abide by those policies, standards, and procedures as it reviews doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral training programs. The goal of accountability is to ensure quality and integrity in the accreditation process.

c. Transparency

As part of its commitment to accountability, the CoA is transparent regarding the policies, standards, and procedures by which it operates. It is open to and values input regarding these from any of its stakeholder groups. The CoA is also committed to transparency regarding its decisions, within the limits imposed by the confidentiality of the information it receives from programs as part of their application process.

d. Peer Review

Peer-review is fundamental to the decision making of the CoA. This process ensures that the education students/trainees receive is assessed by peers nominated for their expertise in Health Service Psychology education. Peer review, following carefully developed policies, standards, and procedures, further ensures that the program review process will be fair and objective. A goal of the peer-review process is to promote trust and credibility of the process and outcomes of program review.

2. In addition to the principles and values that regulate the functions of the CoA, the following five principles guide accreditation decisions, such that programs whose policies and procedures clearly violate them would not be accredited.

a. Commitment to Cultural and Individual Differences and Diversity

The Commission on Accreditation is committed to a broad definition of cultural and individual differences and diversity that includes, but is not limited to, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, national origin, race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

b. Broad and General Preparation for Practice at the Entry Level

Education in health service psychology resides on a continuum; progressing from broad and general preparation for practice at the entry level at the doctoral and internship levels to advanced preparation at the at the postdoctoral level in areas of emphasis and/or recognized specialties.

Doctoral graduate and internship education and training in preparation for entry-level practice in health service psychology should be broad and professional in its orientation rather than narrow and technical. This preparation should be based on the existing and evolving body of knowledge, skills, and competencies that define the declared substantive practice area(s) and should be well integrated with the broad theoretical and scientific foundations of the discipline and field of psychology in general.

c. Advanced Preparation for Practice at the Postdoctoral Level in Areas of Emphasis and/or Recognized Specialties

Postdoctoral residency education and training in health service psychology reflects advanced and focused knowledge of the science and practice of psychology. It builds upon the breadth of knowledge attained in earlier doctoral and internship education so as to ensure competence in health service psychology and is of sufficient depth and focus to ensure advanced proficiency in the traditional or specialty practice area for which the residents are being prepared. This preparation should be based on the existing and evolving body of knowledge, skills, and competencies that define the declared traditional or specialty practice area(s), and should be well integrated with the broad theoretical and scientific foundations of the discipline and field of psychology in general.

d. Science and Practice

The competent practice of psychology requires attention to the empirical basis for all methods involved in psychological practice, including a scientific orientation toward

psychological knowledge and methods. Therefore, education and training as a psychologist should be based on the existing and evolving body of general knowledge and methods in the science and practice of psychology, whether in preparation for entry-level practice or in preparation for advanced-level practice in a substantive traditional or specialty practice area. Broad and general knowledge in the discipline of psychology are foundational to and should be well integrated with the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that define a particular area of interest in health service psychology. The relative emphasis a particular program places on science and practice should be consistent with its training aims and the intended career path of its students/trainees. However, all programs should enable their students to understand the value of science for the practice of psychology and the value of practice for the science of psychology.

e. Program Aims and Student/Trainee Competencies

A program or institution will be evaluated in light of its **educational aims**, the demonstrated competencies of its students/trainees, and the career paths of its graduates. There are certain **educational aims** that are accepted by the profession as necessary, including adequate mastery by students/trainees of the discipline-specific knowledge in psychology and the profession-wide competencies, as delineated by various stakeholders in psychology, including the Board of Educational Affairs of APA and licensing boards.

The program should be consistent with the stated aims, its policies, and with the standards of CoA described herein. Consistent with these parameters, a program should have a clear, coherent, and well-articulated description of the principles underlying its training philosophy and **aims**, as well as a clear description of the resources, methods, and processes by which it proposes to attain its desired training outcomes. A program may describe program-specific competencies in addition to profession-wide competencies. Such program-specific competencies should be consistent with the stated **aims of the program** and with the general requirements of accreditation and should include clear demonstration by students/trainees of attainment of discipline-specific knowledge and profession-wide competencies.

The **program's aims** and desired training outcomes should be consistent with that of its parent or sponsor institution's mission. The program should also address the validity and consistency of its aims and mission in relation to current professional standards and regional and national needs.

C. Outcome Oriented Evaluation Focus

The accreditation review process places great emphasis on the outcomes of a program's training efforts. The accreditation process reviews resources and processes to ensure that

they are adequate to meet the program's aims and the SoA. However these evaluations are not meant to discourage experimentation, innovation, or modernization with regard to the delivery of education.

Consistent with this outcomes-oriented approach, the accreditation standards do not contain a "checklist" of criteria. Rather, they identify and describe the profession-wide competencies and the discipline specific knowledge that all programs must address as well as general areas that are considered essential to the success of any training program in health service psychology. Programs are expected to document their record of achievements in these areas (in the case of already accredited programs), or their potential for success (in the case of applicant programs).

It is assumed that, with reasonable guidance about the kind of information needed by the CoA, programs can decide how best to present their aims, competencies, and outcomes. Similarly, it is assumed that with adequate information from a program, the CoA can reach an informed, fair, and reasonable decision about that program without relying solely on quantitative indices or on highly restrictive lists of specific criteria.

Protection of the interests of the program and the public will be ensured by the creation of procedures which utilize fair and reasonable evaluative methods to assess:

1. The clarity of program aims and outcomes and their consistency with accreditation standards;
2. The sufficiency of resources and adequacy of processes to support the accomplishment of the program's aims
3. The effectiveness of a program to achieve its aims and outcomes; and
4. The likelihood that such outcomes can be maintained or improved over time.

D. Function of the CoA: Professional Judgment

This document reflects shared assumptions about the attributes of high-quality education. It is assumed that the CoA will use these shared assumptions, the collective professional judgment of its members, and the accreditation standards to reach an informed, fair, and reasonable decision about a program's readiness for accreditation review and/or its accreditation.

The CoA, in representing a broad array of constituencies, has the authority to adopt implementing regulations which elucidate, interpret, and operationally define its standards, principles, procedures, and domains. The implementing regulations are meant to convey to programs and the public the criteria used by the CoA in determining a program's compliance with a standard. The CoA may in its decision making processes refer to or adopt

definitions, aims, practices, and principles developed by certain health service psychology training communities or reference groups. By creating procedures which utilize fair and reasonable evaluative methods designed to assess program compliance with accreditation standards, principles, and areas the CoA seeks to ensure protection of the interests of the program and the public.

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