

Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation  
American Psychological Association  
750 First St. NE  
Washington, DC 20002

December 5, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

The [\*Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology, Master's Degree Programs\*](#) (SoA-M) outlines education and training requirements for the accreditation of health service psychology programs at the master's level. Following the approval of the SoA-M by the APA Council of Representatives as Association policy in February of 2021, the APA Commission on Accreditation (APA-CoA) have been working diligently to develop accompanying Implementing Regulations (IRs) in Section C, which correspond to the SoA-M. Following its Fall 2022 program review meeting, the CoA is presenting IR C-7 M for its first round of public comment.

Per the SoA-M's Standard II.B.1.a., Discipline-specific knowledge includes two categories: Basic content areas in scientific knowledge in addition to Research and Psychometrics. IR C-7 M provides considerations specific to these categories as well as all aspects of discipline-specific knowledge.

In accordance with the APA "Policies for Accreditation Governance" and U.S. Department of Education regulations for notice and comment, the CoA will make the proposed revisions available for a sixty (60) day period of public review and comment. The comment period is scheduled to begin at **5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time on December 5, 2022 and will continue through 5:00pm Eastern Standard Time on February 2, 2023**. Information about the proposed standards and public comment is available at <http://apps.apa.org/accredcomment/>.

To promote thoughtful discussion, the CoA is providing an electronic-based form for public comment submission. Comments and other information including users' identities will be public, while email addresses used in the registration process will be kept confidential. The CoA will consider all comments received and make appropriate revisions should they be deemed necessary prior to approval of the final versions of the IRs

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation at (202) 336-5979 or [apaaccred@apa.org](mailto:apaaccred@apa.org). On behalf of the CoA, thank you for your review and comments.

## C-7 M. Discipline-Specific Knowledge

(Commission on Accreditation, prepared for public comment, October 2022)

Discipline-specific knowledge serves as a cornerstone of identity as a psychologist and orientation to health service psychology. Therefore, all students in accredited master's programs shall demonstrate knowledge, broadly construed, in the discipline of psychology. This discipline-specific knowledge (DSK) base shall include basic content areas in scientific psychology and considerations specific to research and psychometrics.

*Discipline-specific knowledge*, as it is articulated in the *Standards of Accreditation for Master's Programs*, Standard II.B.1.a., includes two categories.

### **Category 1: Basic content areas in scientific psychology (undergraduate or graduate level)**

*Programs may elect to meet the following areas of knowledge at either the undergraduate- or graduate-level*

- (a) ***Affective Aspects of Behavior***, including topics such as affect, mood, and emotion. Psychopathology and mood disorders do not by themselves fulfill this category.
- (b) ***Biological Aspects of Behavior***, including multiple biological underpinnings of behavior, such as neural, physiological, anatomical, and genetic aspects of behavior. Although neuropsychological assessment and psychopharmacology can be included in this category, they do not, by themselves, fulfill this category.
- (c) ***Cognitive Aspects of Behavior***, including topics such as learning, memory, thought processes, and decision-making. Cognitive testing and cognitive therapy do not, by themselves, fulfill this category.
- (d) ***Developmental Aspects of Behavior***, including transitions, growth, and development across an individual's life. Coverage limited to one developmental period (e.g., infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, or late life) is not sufficient to fulfill this category.
- (e) ***Social Aspects of Behavior***, including topics such as group processes, attributions, discrimination, and attitudes. Individual and cultural diversity and group or family therapy do not, by themselves, fulfill this category.

### **Category 2: Research and Psychometrics (graduate level only)**

*Programs must cover the following areas of knowledge at the graduate level*

- (a) ***Consumption of research***, including the reading and interpretation of primary source literature, attending to trustworthiness in qualitative and validity in quantitative research with an understanding of sampling issues, parametric assumptions, design confounds, and meta-analyses.
- (b) ***Research related to practice***, including topics such as qualitative inquiry, single-case designs, quantitatively describing outcomes, statistical description, logic models, and basic inferential statistics.
- (c) ***Psychometrics***, including topics such as theory and techniques of psychological measurement, scale and inventory construction, reliability, validity, evaluation of measurement quality, classical and contemporary measurement theory, and standardization.

## **Overarching considerations that apply to all aspects of DSK**

Several aspects of this IR are intentionally written broadly to allow programs to design curricula that are consistent with their aims, the training needs of their students, and evolutions in the field. The narrative descriptions provided in the bullet points above for each of the discipline-specific content areas are **not** checklists of required topics; rather, they are **examples** of the sorts of topics that may be included. For

example, under Category 2, all programs are expected to provide evaluated-level experience in research methods and psychometrics; however, different programs may elect to include customized topics within those broad headings.

Coverage of discipline-specific knowledge within an accredited program may be provided through coursework (e.g., individual courses or material infused across multiple courses) or through other evaluated educational experiences.

### **Considerations specific to Category 1: *Basic Content Areas in Scientific Psychology***

The basic content areas in scientific psychology may be accomplished before matriculation into the master's program and/or through undergraduate-level work after matriculation into the master's program. Alternatively, programs may choose to cover this domain of knowledge at the graduate rather than the undergraduate level. Refer to the section below entitled *Foundational knowledge attained outside of the master's program* for information about evaluation of these types of educational experiences.

Programs must describe how they determine whether courses are graduate level.

If programs offer coverage of these areas at a graduate level, then the training must be consistent with *graduate-level training* as defined below in this IR.

***It is not consistent with the SoA for the entirety of a student's education in the DSK to occur before matriculation into the master's program or through undergraduate coursework following matriculation into the master's program.***

### **Considerations specific to Category 2: *Research and Psychometrics***

As required by the SoA, programs must demonstrate that students are provided the opportunity to acquire and be evaluated on Category 2 areas of discipline-specific knowledge at the graduate level. In evaluating whether a program has provided sufficient coverage of the DSK, the CoA will require documentation that, *at program completion*, each of its students has demonstrated sufficient knowledge *in each research and psychometrics area* to allow 1) *graduate-level* interaction with the scientific literature that draws on these categories and 2) an understanding of the scientific foundations of the Profession-Wide Competencies. Refer to the section below entitled *Graduate-Level Training* for information about how the curriculum will be evaluated by CoA to ensure sufficient graduate-level coverage.

Regardless of the method by which a program chooses to satisfy the DSK requirement, the program must document how *each* student demonstrates graduate-level knowledge in the relevant content areas. The program must also document procedures for ensuring the curriculum plan in these content areas are developed, provided, and evaluated by faculty who are well qualified in the content areas as specified in IR C-23 M.

#### *Evaluating graduate-level training*

Graduate-level training must include evidence of graduate students' exposure to knowledge through a curricular experience that utilizes primary source materials (including original empirical work that represents the current state of the area), emphasizes critical thinking and communication at an advanced level, and facilitates integration of DSK with the program's substantive area(s) of practice. It is not required that coverage of Statistical Analysis or Psychometrics include original source materials.

As programs work to confirm that their graduate-level training and evaluation is sufficient to meet these criteria, they are advised to ensure that students are interacting with current primary source materials and that they are evaluated in part on their ability to communicate critical thinking at an advanced level.

*Evaluating discipline-specific knowledge attained outside of the master's program*

Programs that permit the attainment of basic content areas in scientific psychology through experiences that were not acquired within the accredited program bear a significant responsibility for documenting the quality/rigor, currency, standardization, and fairness of the method for establishing students' knowledge.

If programs permit students to attain mastery of research and psychometric knowledge of DSK outside their master's level training (i.e., before matriculation or through undergraduate coursework they may enroll in while they are also master's students), it is incumbent upon programs to develop and implement systematic processes to evaluate *each individual student's DSK*. The CoA will assess the extent to which these systematic processes are:

- Sufficiently rigorous to demonstrate students' substantial understanding of DSK.
- Appropriate for the program's intended use.
- Free from discrimination on bases irrelevant to success in the master's program.
- Based on a substantial educational experience that included evaluation of knowledge contemporaneous with the experience (e.g., a course for which the instructor assigned a grade at course completion, rather than an activity completed in the remote past that was evaluated *post hoc* by a member of the master's program's faculty).

At times a program may determine that its evaluation methods or minimum criteria could inadvertently discriminate against an individual student on the basis of issues irrelevant to success in the master's program. In this case, the program should utilize alternative methods and corresponding criteria and document this determination process and the specific criteria used.