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FACULTY OPINIONS ON THE CORE CURRICULUM: A SURVEY

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With the proliferation of practitioner-oriented programs in professional psychology during the past 20 years, concern has been expressed about the sufficiency of the traditional psychology curriculum. At the 1986 Mission Bay conference of the National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology (NCSPP), the resolutions advocated that the content of core-curriculum requirements for professional psychology programs be broadened so that schools would more explicitly demonstrate their coverage of competencies necessary for the successful practice of psychology. Bent and Cannon (1987) summarized six competency areas within which professional psychologists practice: relationship, assessment, intervention, research and evaluation, consultation and teaching, and management and supervision. Helping students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes in these six competencies is at the heart of the proposed curriculum.

The competencies were identified originally by synthesizing the results of various studies and surveys (Bent & Cannon, 1987). The six competencies were later refined by program administrators at NCSPP meetings. However, ultimately, it is the faculty of the professional schools who implement the core curriculum. As stated by Derner and Stricker (1986), "the members of the faculty, including a substantial number of active practitioners, are in the best position to determine the educational and training needs of a group of students who aspire to enter the field" (p. 38). It seems crucial, therefore, to draw on faculty expertise to further develop and implement the proposed curriculum.

Method

A survey was developed to gather faculty opinions about the curricular aspects of the six competency areas identified by NCSPP at Mission Bay. After providing demographic information, faculty were asked to comment on (a) current coverage of each competency; (b) the most effective means of coverage of each competency; (c) chal-

lenges to be faced in implementing each competency; (d) each competency's role in shaping the future of the field of psychology; and (e) anticipated effects of the competency-based curriculum as a whole. Additional questions, selected as being particularly relevant to psychology training at this time, were asked about three of the competencies.

Surveys were sent to administrators of programs that are members or associate members of NCSPP, and the administrators were asked to distribute the surveys and postpaid return envelopes to their core faculty members. Of the 528 surveys sent, the actual number distributed is unknown. Completed surveys were received from 75 faculty members. Not all respondents answered every question; thus, the sample size for questions is not always 75.

The respondents were 43 men and 26 women (6 did not specify), ranging in age from 32 to 74 years ($M = 46.10$, $SD = 9.58$). Of those specifying, most (94%) held a PhD, typically obtained in clinical psychology (67%) from a Boulder-model program (72%). They taught for at least 24 different schools. Of those specifying, 61% taught full time. Many (53%) taught in free-standing programs that are not university affiliated, 44% taught in university-based programs, and 3% taught in free-standing, university-affiliated programs. The majority of respondents (56%) taught exclusively in PsyD programs, 22% in PhD programs, and 22% in both PsyD and PhD programs. Most (94%) taught courses in clinical areas.

Results

Responses are reported individually for each competency. Particular responses to the first two issues previously listed are not reported for the relationship, assessment, intervention, and research and evaluation competencies because responses indicated that most programs provided appropriate, effective levels of current coverage through courses or supervised experiences. These issues are discussed in relation to the consultation and education competency and the management and supervision competency. Along with frequency data, a sample of common and innovative responses is presented.

Relationship Competency

Challenges in implementation. The need for greater numbers of minority students and faculty was noted by 13% of the respondents. A parallel concern was to place more emphasis on understanding and on addressing the needs of minority clients and special or underserved populations (9%). Another theme mentioned by 9% of the respondents related to concerns about faculty awareness and resources in the relationship domain. The need to integrate this competency throughout the curriculum was also stressed.

Role in shaping the future. Fifteen percent of the respondents stressed the need for greater emphasis on minority groups and special populations. One respondent suggested that graduate students identify minority group "subspecialties," with required fieldwork and language study if relevant. Thirteen percent of the respondents made global statements about the need to make the relationship competency a high priority; 21% stressed the need to emphasize relationship skills and knowledge through

course work or supervised clinical experience. Additional responses addressed how to integrate classroom and clinical experience and how to conduct group experiential learning activities for graduate students.

Assessment Competency

Challenges in implementation. Several discernible themes emerged. The modal concern, expressed by 17% of the respondents, was the difficulty of providing adequate assessment-training opportunities for students. Problems in generating testing referrals and locating sufficient assessment-training sites were noted. A related concern, identified by 8% of the respondents, was the ability to provide adequate experience with minority clients or special populations (e.g., children). Challenges regarding the state of the art in assessment were mentioned by 8% of the respondents including the need for a more critical approach to assessment and the need to keep pace with research developments. Other concerns, mentioned by at least 4% of the respondents, were finding sufficient numbers of faculty with expertise and interest in assessment and overcoming student disinterest or poor preparation in this area. On a more positive note, 20% of the sample reported that their schools faced no special challenges in covering assessment.

Role in shaping the future. There was little consensus about how to impact the discipline's future through the assessment competency. Global statements about the importance of assessment and the need to promote and maintain high standards were made by 21% of the respondents. One respondent noted, "[Assessment] must be emphasized to the same level as psychotherapy. After all, assessment skills are what make us unique." Another respondent lamented that "too many practicing psychologists are not [competent in assessment]." The need for assessment methods to be more cross-culturally relevant was mentioned by 7% of the respondents. Other responses ranged from a call for increased use of computers to a recommendation for a more phenomenological approach.

Intervention Competency

Challenges in implementation. The adequacy of faculty resources was identified as a special challenge by 12% of the respondents. The specific concerns included having sufficient faculty to cover all the desired intervention areas and the need to include more faculty in the supervision of students' clinical work. Another theme was the difficulty integrating various theories, research, and clinical methods relevant to intervention which 12% of the respondents mentioned. The challenge of responding to the needs of ethnic minorities and special groups was given by 5% of the respondents. Four percent of the respondents expressed concern about pressure to "separate rather than integrate" clinical from classroom work. Specific mention was also made of the usefulness of role play, personal therapy for students, and cotherapy with faculty members.

Role in shaping the future. The need to integrate intervention strategies more successfully was mentioned by 8% of the respondents. As just mentioned, the importance of addressing the needs of cultural minorities and special groups was noted by

5%. Another theme was the need to broaden the concept of intervention to include systems and organization interventions, political and legislative roles, and psychologists in the media. Other responses focused on altering our intervention models (e.g., more emphasis on short-term treatment, prevention, and methods with strong empirical support) or addressed specific professional or discipline-wide issues (e.g., more support for professional schools and dealing with the funding crisis in mental health).

Specific competency concerns. Respondents were asked whether they favored intensive training in a single theoretical orientation or modality (depth) versus exposure to several orientations or modalities (breadth). Most respondents (61%) favored breadth at the graduate school level. Moreover, there was some support for movement toward eclecticism as reflected in the comment, "We should work toward the elimination of schools of psychotherapy." A smaller number (12%) favored a depth-oriented approach. One respondent noted that "superficiality in the guise of 'breadth' is rampant." Other respondents (13%) recommended that both in-depth coverage and broad exposure should be available; several respondents suggested that in-depth specialization in a particular theoretical orientation should occur at the postdoctoral level.

Research and Evaluation Competency

Challenges in implementation. The modal challenge was that students showed low interest, poor preparation, and high levels of anxiety about research requirements (21%). One respondent suggested increasing student interest by teaching a course on influential clinical theorists with an emphasis on epistemology. A second category of challenges included faculty issues (11%), such as a lack of faculty preparation and interest, and insufficient faculty time to do research as a result of an overload of teaching and of other responsibilities. Some concern was expressed about the unequal distribution of research supervision responsibilities, which was seen as unfair but inevitable when faculty skill and interest vary greatly. A third category included pragmatic or structural concerns (15%), such as a lack of funding and incentives to do research, poor library and computer facilities, difficulty locating research subjects, the need for more clinically trained research instructors, difficulty in finding unpaid dissertation committee members, and the problem of the all-but-dissertation student. The final category of challenges was the difficulty encountered in defining the role of research in a practitioner program (16%), a problem exacerbated by the low numbers of faculty members who were trained in a practitioner model.

Role in shaping the future. The most commonly held view was that research should continue to be central to our training and that students should gain experience in doing research (28%). In contrast, others (15%) commented that training students to be critical readers of the literature ("consumers of research") who base their practice on data-based findings should be our goal. It is important to note that many respondents, including many of those who believe students should conduct research, believe that methods and content should be redefined to make research more relevant to the applied practice of psychology. Several respondents hoped that students would learn to (a) make use of well-researched clinical methods; and (b) conduct case, outcome, and program evaluation studies to evaluate their own work.

Consultation and Teaching Competency

Current and effective coverage. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that their programs did not cover systematically consultation and teaching. However, 53% were from programs that offered some exposure. Effective teaching methods included supervised practical experience (23%), course work (16%), or a combination of the two (25%). Current and suggested methods of coverage that were unique included providing (student) speakers to the community, connecting with campus organizations to consult, and having students develop a course to be critiqued.

Challenges in implementation. The modal challenge (16%) was finding time for additional courses in an already crowded curriculum. Eleven percent were concerned about being able to find opportunities for student practice. Some felt this competency should be omitted (5%), and others felt that students were not interested in this competency (3%). Although many faculty viewed coverage of this competency as ideal, their enthusiasm was tempered by the inability to reconcile the difficulty of expanding an already crowded curriculum.

Management and Supervision Competency

Current and effective coverage. Twenty-five percent of the respondents taught in programs in which the management and supervision competency was not taught systematically, although 23% taught in programs where elective or required courses were offered. Three percent of the respondents came from programs where a hierarchical system of having senior students supervise more junior students was used. Effective teaching methods included courses (23%), supervised experience (8%), or both (25%). Some felt this should be omitted from the curriculum (7%).

The modal concern about the inclusion of this competency was the lack of room in the curriculum (15%). Other concerns were difficulty finding opportunities for supervised experience (5%) and difficulty finding qualified supervisors (5%). Several (8%) respondents simply stated that this competency did not belong in the curriculum. As one respondent stated, "It is difficult to teach supervisory skill until students have reached [an advanced level of clinical skill]."

Role in shaping the future. Nine percent of the respondents would like to see courses, practica, or some combination offered in the management and supervision competency. Five percent would like this to be a specialized elective track. Other respondents suggested omitting this from the curriculum; still others focused on the importance of this competency for enabling psychologists to direct programs, avoid malpractice suits, and avoid managed health care.

Specific competency concerns. The faculty was asked whether the curriculum should address specifically the skills needed to establish and maintain a private practice. The responses to survey items reveal strong disagreement among respondents. Thirteen (17%) respondents said yes, cover this quite specifically through course work and other experiences. Twelve (16%) said no, we should not address this in the curriculum. A typical negative response was "We need to focus on how (societal) needs can best be met; professional psychology programs do themselves and the public a

Table 1
Frequency of Responses to Questions About the Impact of the
Competency-Based Core Curriculum in Professional Psychology

Affected factor	Direction of impact		
	Increase	Remain the same	Decrease
Relevance of curriculum	41	24	3
Competence of graduates	53	13	3
Ability of graduates to become licensed	30	36	1
Number of malpractice suits	3	33	27
Student satisfaction with programs	38	16	12
Faculty satisfaction with programs	28	26	13
Length of doctoral program	35	30	2
Cost of doctoral program	45	19	2
Number of electives taken	20	26	20

disservice by focusing on private practice." An additional 11% said that workshops or colloquia taught outside of the general curriculum would be acceptable. Although not advocating for a separate course, 15% of the respondents stated that issues of private practice could be covered as part of a course on ethics (7%) or various delivery systems (8%). Clearly, there is a need for further discussion of the role of private practice training in the core curriculum.

Anticipated Effects of the Competency-Based Core Curriculum

As is seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents projected the impact of the professional core competencies in the curriculum to be quite positive. Most faculty stated that the proposed core will increase the relevance of the curriculum and that student and, to a lesser extent, faculty satisfaction will increase. Most encouraging is the belief of the vast majority of respondents that the core curriculum will increase the competence of program graduates. Respondents also believed that the ability of graduates to become licensed will increase and the number of malpractice suits will decrease. On a more cautious note, the majority of respondents believed that both the length and the cost of programs will increase when the core is implemented.

Conclusion

As perceived by the faculty, most programs in professional psychology adequately covered the relationship, assessment, intervention, and research and evaluation competencies. Challenges in implementation included the need for greater attention to issues of diversity; the need to provide increased quantity and quality of assessment-training opportunities; difficulty knowing how and when to integrate diverse

intervention methods, theories, and research; and the need to find models of research more relevant to professional psychology training and practice.

The consultation and teaching competency and the management and supervision competency were not seen as consistently covered. Several faculty members expressed confusion about the intended content in these competencies. As one respondent commented, "[Consultation and teaching, and management and supervision] are poorly defined above and in previous NCSPP reports." A common source of confusion was the grouping of these competencies. For example, in the consultation and teaching competency, 59% of the respondents addressed one component (e.g., consultation) or the other (e.g., teaching) or addressed the two components as entirely separate competencies. The same was true for the management and supervision competency (61%). In addition, some faculty experienced difficulty dividing supervision and teaching into two separate competencies, suggesting that the skills involved in these two professional roles may be functionally related. More work is needed to define the content of these competencies for faculty. The authors of several chapters in this volume address this concern.

The vast majority of respondents believed that the competency-based core curriculum, as specified by NCSPP, will improve professional psychology education. However, faculty believed that the trade-off for better prepared graduates will be longer, more costly programs. Although some concern was raised about these latter effects, it is clear that the faculty endorsed much of this curriculum and have much to contribute to its implementation.