

Comprehensive Evaluation of Student Competence and Policies Addressing Student Competence

Overview and Rationale

Professional psychologists must demonstrate competence across a broad range of domains of functioning that are integrated in complex ways. This fact is fundamental for professional psychology training programs which have as their mission the education and training of students for the professional practice of psychology. Thus, faculty, supervisors, professional staff and administrators in professional psychology training programs have a responsibility for teaching and developing students' competence in numerous performance domains as the students matriculate through the educational program. The broadest definition of "competence" is provided by Random House Webster's unabridged dictionary (2001):

Competence: Possession of skill, knowledge, capacity equal to requirement; adequate fitness or ability; duly qualified.

Professional Competence has been defined as the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served (Epstein & Hundert, 2002).

In addition to their responsibility to educate and train professional psychologists, professional psychology faculty and training programs also have a responsibility to protect the public and the profession from students exhibiting incompetence or competence problems. To this end, professional psychology educators, including faculty, staff, supervisors, and administrators have an ethical and legal responsibility to serve as gate-keepers. This gate-keeping role requires that they conduct comprehensive evaluations of student competence and that they intervene whenever a student fails to reach required, minimal levels of professional competence. In some instances, educators' duties and responsibilities extend to remediating a student with competence problems or to dismissing such a student from the training program. When a student's performance falls short of the standard for competence, the performance is viewed as problematic or incompetent. Again, Random House Webster's unabridged dictionary (2001) provides a broad definition of "incompetence":

Incompetence: Without adequate ability, knowledge, fitness, etc.; failing to meet requirements; incapable.

In the remainder of this document, the comprehensive evaluation of student competence, as it is conducted in the School of Professional Psychology (SOPP), is discussed. In addition, SOPP student policies that most directly address student competence as this relates to grading and remediation, legal and ethical conduct and professional integrity are briefly reviewed.

Comprehensive Evaluation of Student Competence

Because professional psychologists are required to function competently across multiple performance domains, evaluation of student competence must be comprehensive in scope. Comprehensive evaluation of student competence goes well beyond areas traditionally thought of as requirements in graduate education such as performance in coursework, on the professional dissertation, the Comprehensive Clinical Examination (CCE), practicum and internship and completion of other related program requirements. In the context of the SOPP, the definition of professional competence is broad and comprehensive and includes, but is not limited to, competence in terms of the more traditional program requirements noted above, as well as competence in the following performance domains:

- Social and interpersonal perceptiveness and interpersonal effectiveness, including effectiveness in relating to peers, faculty and others in the professional educational system, other professionals, clients, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories.
- Self-awareness, self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-understanding, including knowledge of the content and potential impact of one's attitudes, beliefs and values on, peers, faculty and others in the professional educational system, other professionals, clients, the public and individuals from diverse backgrounds and histories.
- Openness to feedback from faculty, supervisors, staff, peers and/or administrators, including the ability and willingness to explore issues that either interfere with the appropriate provision of care, or impede professional development or functioning. This also includes the motivation and ability to resolve issues or problems that interfere with professional development or functioning, including successful completion of remedial plans.
- Emotional maturity, emotional stability, emotional responsiveness, and the motivation and ability to be reliable and responsible in dealing with others. This includes motivation to help others and the capacity for compassion in relating to others.
- Honesty, integrity and ability to comply with and accommodate to legal codes governing the profession, professional standards and professional ethics.
- Ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing.
- Cognitive abilities necessary for professional competence, including the ability to think critically and to effectively integrate information from multiple sources.

Comprehensive Evaluation of Student Competence: SOPP Policies and Procedures

The SOPP provides students with a Student Handbook which contains a number of policies and procedures relevant to students. The Student Handbook can be accessed at SOPP's website <http://wright.edu/sopp>. Students are expected to be familiar with all policies and procedures contained in the Student Handbook, because violation of any student policy is viewed by the faculty as evidence of a serious competence problem.

Although all student policies are very important, there are three policies that are particularly central to SOPP's comprehensive evaluation of student competence. They are the following:

- **Grading and Remediation Policies and Procedures.** This document sets forth expectations for acceptable grades and evaluations with respect to all requirements of the SOPP program. It also provides information on academic probation, remediation of problematic performance and due process when students are reviewed for termination from the program.
- **Policy and Procedures Concerning the Professional Behavior and Conduct of Students.** This document is based on the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* as established by the American Psychological Association and the *Ohio Psychology Laws and Rules Governing Psychologists and School Psychologists* as specified in Ohio Revised Code Chapter 4732 and Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 4732. The document outlines the procedures for students and faculty when confronting instances of unprofessional or illegal conduct and the due process afforded any student charged with violation of the policy.
- **Professional Integrity Policy and Procedures.** This document defines professional integrity as well as competence problems such as plagiarism, and dishonesty in the classroom, practicum or other professional settings. Due process procedures for students charged with violations of the professional integrity policy are outlined.

In addition, the SOPP provides students with several resources which summarize policies and procedures related to several program requirements. These resources can be accessed at SOPP's website <http://wright.edu/sopp>, and include the following:

- **The SOPP Practicum Handbook**
- **The SOPP Professional Dissertation Handbook**
- **Policies and Procedures for the Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation (CCE)**
- **The SOPP Internship Handbook**

These resources provide students with direction as to the policies, procedures and, especially, the comprehensive performance evaluation procedures associated with the practicum, professional dissertation, CCE, and internship requirements.

Professional Competence and Competence Problems.

In an educational program for students aspiring to become professional psychologists, it is assumed that competence develops to higher and higher levels as the student matriculates through the program. Competence in an educational program should always be viewed in the context of a developmental process. Formal and informal teachings by faculty, staff, supervisors and others who serve as professional educators develop

students' knowledge, skills and attitudes, and socialize students into the profession of psychology.

Competence problems may arise from one or multiple sources, they may relate to situational factors, developmental factors, experiential or educational deficiencies, cognitive deficiencies, personal problems or distress, or the lack of personal values, integrity or fitness required of professional psychologists. Also, competence problems may be short-lived or chronic, mild or severe in intensity. Some may be brought to the attention of educators through specific "critical incidents"; others may be more global or foundational and develop in a slow, more insidious fashion. Indeed, some students may not develop, for a variety of reasons, the required, minimal level of competence in one or more domains of professional performance. Because of the complexity inherent in competence problems, some will be viewed as subject to remedial efforts and some will not. Indeed, even when remediation is offered, the student may not be successful in remediating the problematic performance. Instances in which the competence problems are not viewed as remediable, and those in which the student is not successful in remediating the problematic performance, will lead to the termination of the student from the program.

Schedule for Comprehensive Evaluation of Student Competence

Any SOPP student may be scheduled for a special comprehensive evaluation at any time during the academic year. A faculty member, supervisor, staff member or administrator should contact one of the Associate Deans in order to request a special review. A special review may be called for a number of reasons including documentation of a "critical incident" in which a student's competence is viewed as problematic in any way, including the areas outlined in the previous section. Such reviews might be triggered, for example, by a "critical incident" that results in concerns regarding problematic performance in the classroom or on practicum/internship, an incident of academic dishonesty, an ethical violation, a gross violation of professional standards or any specific incident(s) wherein a student is suspected, or determined to have behaved in an incompetent or problematic manner in any professional domain or with respect to any program requirement.

In the absence of a special review triggered by one or more "critical incidents," comprehensive evaluations of student competence are conducted quarterly for student performance in courses and on practicum. Prior to the internship year, annual comprehensive evaluations are conducted for all students by the fully-affiliated SOPP faculty. In addition, all students are evaluated periodically as they move through the professional dissertation, the CCE, and other program requirements. Students on internship receive a mid-year and final comprehensive evaluation which is sent to the SOPP from their internship director.

References and Suggested Readings

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