

# **The Comprehensive Evaluation of Student-Trainee Competence in Professional Psychology Programs<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. Overview and Rationale**

Professional psychologists are expected to demonstrate competence within and across a number of different but interrelated dimensions. Programs that educate and train professional psychologists also strive to protect the public and profession. Therefore, faculty, training staff, supervisors, and administrators in such programs have a duty and responsibility to evaluate the competence of students and trainees across multiple aspects of performance, development, and functioning.

It is important for students and trainees to understand and appreciate that academic competence in professional psychology programs (e.g., doctoral, internship, postdoctoral) is defined and evaluated comprehensively. Specifically, in addition to performance in coursework, seminars, scholarship, comprehensive examinations, and related program requirements, other aspects of professional development and functioning (e.g., cognitive, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, technical, and ethical) will also be evaluated. Such comprehensive evaluation is necessary in order for faculty, training staff, and supervisors to appraise the entire range of academic performance, development, and functioning of their student-trainees. This model policy attempts to disclose and make these expectations explicit for student-trainees prior to program entry and at the outset of education and training.

In response to these issues, the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC) has developed the following model policy that doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral training programs in psychology may use in their respective program handbooks and other written materials (see <http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/cctc.html>). This policy was developed in consultation with CCTC member organizations, and is consistent with a range of oversight, professional, ethical,

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<sup>1</sup> This document was developed by the Student Competence Task Force of the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC) (<http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/cctc.html>) and approved by the CCTC on March 25, 2004. Impetus for this document arose from the need, identified by a number of CCTC members, that programs in professional psychology needed to clarify for themselves and their student-trainees that the comprehensive academic evaluation of student-trainee competence includes the evaluation of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and professional development and functioning. Because this crucial aspect of academic competency had not heretofore been well addressed by the profession of psychology, CCTC approved the establishment of a "Student Competence Task Force" to examine these issues and develop proposed language. This document was developed during 2003 and 2004 by a 17-member task force comprised of representatives from the various CCTC training councils. Individuals with particular knowledge of scholarship related to the evaluation of competency as well as relevant ethical and legal expertise were represented on this task force. The initial draft of this document was developed by the task force and distributed to all of the training councils represented on CCTC. Feedback was subsequently received from multiple perspectives and constituencies (e.g., student, doctoral, internship), and incorporated into this document, which was edited a final time by the task force and distributed to the CCTC for discussion. This document was approved by consensus at the 3/25/04 meeting of the CCTC with the following clarifications: (a) training councils or programs that adopt this "model policy" do so on a voluntary basis (i.e., it is not a "mandated" policy from CCTC); (b) should a training council or program choose to adopt this "model policy" in whole or in part, an opportunity should be provided to student-trainees to consent to this policy prior to entering a training program; (c) student-trainees should know that information relevant to the evaluation of competence as specified in this document may not be privileged information between the student-trainee and the program and/or appropriate representatives of the program.

and licensure guidelines and procedures that are relevant to processes of training, practice, and the assessment of competence within professional psychology (e.g., the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, 2004; *Competencies 2002: Future Directions in Education and Credentialing in Professional Psychology*; *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*, 2003; *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology*, 2003; *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists*, 2002).

## **II. Model Policy**

Students and trainees in professional psychology programs (at the doctoral, internship, or postdoctoral level) should know—prior to program entry, and at the outset of training—that faculty, training staff, supervisors, and administrators have a professional, ethical, and potentially legal obligation to: (a) establish criteria and methods through which aspects of competence other than, and in addition to, a student-trainee's knowledge or skills may be assessed (including, but not limited to, emotional stability and well being, interpersonal skills, professional development, and personal fitness for practice); and, (b) ensure—insofar as possible—that the student-trainees who complete their programs are competent to manage future relationships (e.g., client, collegial, professional, public, scholarly, supervisory, teaching) in an effective and appropriate manner. Because of this commitment, and within the parameters of their administrative authority, professional psychology education and training programs, faculty, training staff, supervisors, and administrators strive not to advance, recommend, or graduate students or trainees with demonstrable problems (e.g., cognitive, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, technical, and ethical) that may interfere with professional competence to other programs, the profession, employers, or the public at large.

As such, within a developmental framework, and with due regard for the inherent power difference between students and faculty, students and trainees should know that their faculty, training staff, and supervisors will evaluate their competence in areas other than, and in addition to, coursework, seminars, scholarship, comprehensive examinations, or related program requirements. These evaluative areas include, but are not limited to, demonstration of sufficient: (a) interpersonal and professional competence (e.g., the ways in which student-trainees relate to clients, peers, faculty, allied professionals, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories); (b) self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-evaluation (e.g., knowledge of the content and potential impact of one's own beliefs and values on clients, peers, faculty, allied professionals, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories); (c) openness to processes of supervision (e.g., the ability and willingness to explore issues that either interfere with the appropriate provision of care or impede professional development or functioning); and (d) resolution of issues or problems that interfere with professional development or functioning in a satisfactory manner (e.g., by responding constructively to feedback from supervisors or program faculty; by the successful completion of remediation plans; by participating in personal therapy in order to resolve issues or problems).

This policy is applicable to settings and contexts in which evaluation would appropriately occur (e.g., coursework, practica, supervision), rather than settings and contexts that are unrelated to the formal process of education and training (e.g., non-academic, social contexts). However,

irrespective of setting or context, when a student-trainee's conduct clearly and demonstrably (a) impacts the performance, development, or functioning of the student-trainee, (b) raises questions of an ethical nature, (c) represents a risk to public safety, or (d) damages the representation of psychology to the profession or public, appropriate representatives of the program may review such conduct within the context of the program's evaluation processes.

Although the purpose of this policy is to inform students and trainees that evaluation will occur in these areas, it should also be emphasized that a program's evaluation processes and content should typically include: (a) information regarding evaluation processes and standards (e.g., procedures should be consistent and content verifiable); (b) information regarding the primary purpose of evaluation (e.g., to facilitate student or trainee development; to enhance self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-assessment; to emphasize strengths as well as areas for improvement; to assist in the development of remediation plans when necessary); (c) more than one source of information regarding the evaluative area(s) in question (e.g., across supervisors and settings); and (d) opportunities for remediation, provided that faculty, training staff, or supervisors conclude that satisfactory remediation is possible for a given student-trainee. Finally, the criteria, methods, and processes through which student-trainees will be evaluated should be clearly specified in a program's handbook, which should also include information regarding due process policies and procedures (e.g., including, but not limited to, review of a program's evaluation processes and decisions).