

**Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) in School Psychology  
Concept Paper  
Fall 2012**

**I. Proposed by: Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts**

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**II. Abstract**

The Department of Psychology in RIT's College of Liberal Arts wishes to propose a Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) program in School Psychology. This concept paper outlines the background of the school psychology program, the rationale for offering a Psy.D. degree, the goals for this program, and how the program fits within RIT's mission, strategic direction, and existing programs across the university. The Psy.D. program will build upon the success of the existing Master of Science and Advanced Certificate in School Psychology and offer interdisciplinary opportunities for students and faculty in several RIT colleges.

**III. Description of the Program**

a. *Overview and justification of new program.* RIT has offered a Master of Science (MS) program in School Psychology since 1986 and an Advanced Certificate (AC) since 1999 in the College of Liberal Arts. This 96 quarter-credit program involves two years of full-time study and a one-year full time supervised internship. The program has full approval of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), certifying its alignment with national training and quality standards. From the time of its inception, the program has graduated over 340 students, nearly all of whom either have gained employment as school psychologists or pursued doctoral study at another institution.

The current program in school psychology prepares its graduates for positions within the schools in the role of school psychologists. School psychologists provide a variety of services within the school setting, including consultation with parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff, comprehensive individualized student assessments, and counseling. The RIT MS/AC program offers a broad range of experiences so that students are prepared to fill any of these various roles. The Psy.D. program will continue to provide this broad foundation, but, through an additional year of required coursework and a dissertation, offer courses and experiences that will deepen students' knowledge, enhance their competency, and open additional employment opportunities to them in various settings outside of schools including higher education, mental health agencies, and private practice. Survey data indicate that doctoral level

school psychologists draw significantly higher salaries (approximately \$74,000 per year) than non-doctoral school psychologists (approximately \$62,000; Curtis et al., 2007).

The additional range and depth of training offered in a doctoral program expands the employment options available to program graduates. Doctoral-level applied professional psychologists, such as school psychologists, are eligible to take the Examination for the Practice of Professional Psychology (EPPP) for state licensure. Graduates of the program would also be competitive for post-doctoral training fellowships (typical for doctoral-level psychologists) to gain further expertise and specialized training in a particular subfield of psychology and/or to complete the required supervised clinical hours needed for state licensure. It also benefits a school district that employs a licensed school psychologist, as licensed professionals are able to bill Medicaid on the behalf of their schools for some of the services they provide to eligible students. This provides an additional source of funding for the school district. Currently Masters-level school psychologists are not eligible for licensure in most states (including New York) and therefore unable to bill Medicaid for services in those states. As a result, some job functions traditionally performed by school psychologists may be assigned to other licensed clinicians (e.g., social workers).

*b. Summary of new program curriculum.* A growing trend in the field of school psychology is to expand the scope of professional activities beyond the four walls of the school system, including health, mental health, and higher educational settings. In keeping with this trend, the primary goal of the Psy.D. program at RIT will be to enhance students' competence in the areas of systems-level interventions, program development and evaluation, community mental health, and assessment and intervention with various disabilities. The overarching goals of the program are as follows: 1) to enhance students' knowledge of the challenges facing children in home, school, and community settings; 2) to develop student skills in prevention, assessment, remediation, and therapeutic interventions for a variety of learning, developmental, mental health, and other problems that affect student outcomes; 3) to develop student skills in conducting research, evaluating the research literature, and translating research into practice; 4) to enhance students' skills in understanding and working with diverse populations and navigating the various school and community systems; 5) to provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, including the supervision of other psychologists and educational/mental health service providers.

Through collaboration with other departments and colleges at RIT, we will offer a number of unique training options, or concentrations, in addition to the core Psy.D. curriculum that our doctoral students can pursue as they complete their education at RIT. Three such options are described below. Each option has received support from faculty and leadership in the respective departments and colleges.

*Deaf Education.* Currently, few training programs in school psychology prepare graduates to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, and a need exists for more psychologists with such expertise. The Psy.D. program will provide research and training experiences for those students with an interest in Deaf Education, offering training in deaf culture and educational and mental health issues relevant to this population.

*Medical and Mental Health Collaboration.* The second option will draw upon the clinical resources and expertise faculty in the Department of Psychology and in the College of Health Sciences and Technology. Integrated training experiences across programs will meet an urgent need for greater expertise in interdisciplinary collaboration for the evaluation and treatment of mental health disorders in children and youth. This population often presents with complex problems requiring comprehensive psychological, medical, and educational interventions. This training option also would prepare students for careers in hospitals, mental health settings, and private practice.

*Community and Forensic School Psychology.* A third option will provide Psy.D. students with a deeper understanding of community issues through collaboration with the Department of Criminal Justice (CJ). Children and adolescents who are involved with the Juvenile Court System are often still attending school. The applied professional psychologist with a background in criminal justice would be able to serve as a consultant to the schools about court involvement and serve as a consultant to the courts about school programs that may reduce the rate of juvenile recidivism.

#### **IV. Fit with RIT Mission and Strategy**

Collectively, the goals of the Psy.D. program, and the means by which we intend to achieve those goals, are consistent with RIT's mission, strategic direction, and core values.

A Psy.D. is career-oriented in that it has emerged as a professional doctoral degree in psychology. Although individuals with this degree can and do become employed in faculty positions in higher education, the primary focus of the Psy.D. is the development of highly competent practitioners.

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) places an emphasis on educational training that is innovative, interdisciplinary, and applied. There is also a strong emphasis on scholarship activities and the application of research findings to real-world settings. The Psy.D. program in school psychology will be an excellent fit with all of these goals.

#### **V. Synergy with Other Programs**

As described in the previous section, the Psy.D. program will extend across a number of different departments and colleges at RIT, including the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, the Institute for Health Sciences and Technology and the Criminal Justice Department in

the College of Liberal Arts. These linkages will distinguish RIT's Psy.D. program in School Psychology from other similar programs while providing students with skills that are in short supply and essential to meeting the changing needs of children, families, and schools.

Currently, there are a number of collaborative research projects among the Departments of Psychology and CJ and NTID, including, for example, an NIH grant proposal to study victimization and health literacy among deaf women (Drs. Schlehofer, Schenkel, McQuiller Williams, and Porter). These collaborations can support the Psy.D. students by providing valuable research and training opportunities as well as providing potential funding for their education (e.g. tuition waiver, hourly wage, stipend).

#### **VI. Administrative Structure**

The Psy.D. program in School Psychology will be housed within the Psychology Department in the College of Liberal Arts. Immediate responsibility for the administration of the program will belong to the Graduate Director of School Psychology. This individual also will maintain responsibility for the MS/AC program and continue to report to the Chair of the Department of Psychology. Currently the Department of Psychology has a Graduate Coordinator, who is responsible for the MS programs in School Psychology and Applied Experimental and Engineering Psychology. As the MS AEEP program continues to grow, it soon will have its own coordinator, freeing the holder of the Graduate Coordinator position to assume administrative responsibility for the Psy.D. program.

#### **VII. Enrollment Management Expectations and Sustainment**

The MS/AC program in School Psychology typically receives 40 to 60 applicants per year, and enrolls 13 to 17 new students each year. However, the number of applicants and entering students has decreased over the past few years. Upon surveying applicants who declined our admission offer, one of the top reasons students chose other programs was a lack of the option to pursue doctoral training at RIT. A recent survey conducted by the School Psychology Educators' Council of New York State (SPECNYS), showed a declining trend in applications and enrollment for Masters'-level programs in the state, while applications to doctoral programs have remained constant or increased. A Psy.D. program is expected to lead to a larger pool of highly desirable applicants and more high-quality students choosing to pursue their graduate education at RIT.

Currently there are no doctoral programs in school psychology in the Greater Rochester area. A significant number of masters-level school psychologists who are employed in the Rochester area have expressed strong interest in pursuing a doctoral degree at RIT, should one become available. The only institutions in upstate New York offering the Psy.D. degree in school psychology are Alfred University and the State University of New York at Albany.

The Psy.D. program would support undergraduate education at RIT by providing graduate student models and opportunities for research and mentoring for undergraduate students. Approximately 60% of the current Psychology majors are pursuing the clinical track option. These students are especially interested in mental health issues and would benefit from increased faculty and graduate student activity related to these issues.

### **VIII. Impact on Resources**

The School Psychology Program is housed in the Department of Psychology. Four tenured faculty members, one lecturer, and several adjunct faculty maintain responsibility for delivering the program. Besides the aforementioned core faculty in School Psychology, the Psychology Department as a whole includes two clinical psychologists, two developmental psychologists, and several other faculty members with expertise that would benefit students in the current program and who could support the Psy.D. curriculum. This may lessen the incremental financial commitments for the new program, making it economically feasible. The program is expected to require one to two additional full-time faculty lines to cover the additional year of coursework required and undergraduate teaching assignments for current faculty who may become engaged in delivering the Psy.D. program.

Unlike the traditional Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, where graduate training has a primary focus on research and scholarship activities, the Psy.D. is a more applied clinical degree that typically is tuition-driven. Students who enroll in Psy.D. programs generally expect to pay more tuition and receive less support than students in Ph.D. programs (see Appendix for information comparing funding support and debt in Ph.D. vs. Psy.D. programs in psychology; Michalski & Pate, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Given the demand for doctoral training in school psychology and the lack of any programs in the Rochester area, a Psy.D. program would meet a current need. RIT is uniquely positioned to fill that need, given the substantial existing resources and expertise available to support the program. In addition, this program fits well within the principles guiding the evolving Academic Blueprint. It is applied and career-oriented, interdisciplinary, and student-centered. It would strengthen the College of Liberal Arts and RIT as a whole. Having doctoral students will provide additional support and infrastructure for externally-funded research, thus increasing the productivity of the faculty and our competitiveness in securing grant funding. The uniqueness and quality of the educational training has the potential to attract students nationwide and internationally. This program would be a worthy investment for RIT with a high probability for success.

## References

Curtis, M. J., Lopez, A. D., Batsche, G. M., Minch, D., & Abshier, D. (2007, March). Status report on school psychology: A national perspective. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, New York City.

Michalski, D., & Pate, W. (2010, August). Funding issues and resources for clinically oriented graduate students. Paper presented at the APA 188<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, San Diego, CA.

Appendix

Selected Slides from Michalski & Pate (2010)



APA 118th Annual Convention

SAN DIEGO 2010

August 12-15

## Definitions

- **Health Service Provider (HSP):** Doctoral-level degree in a psychology subfield focused on providing health/mental health services; typically a clinical, counseling, or school subfield.
- **Research/Other:** Psychology degree in a subfield traditionally seen as research/academic focus area (e.g. cognitive, I/O, educational, personality, or social psychology).
- **'Recent' Doctorate:** Psychologist within 2 years of receiving their doctorate degree.

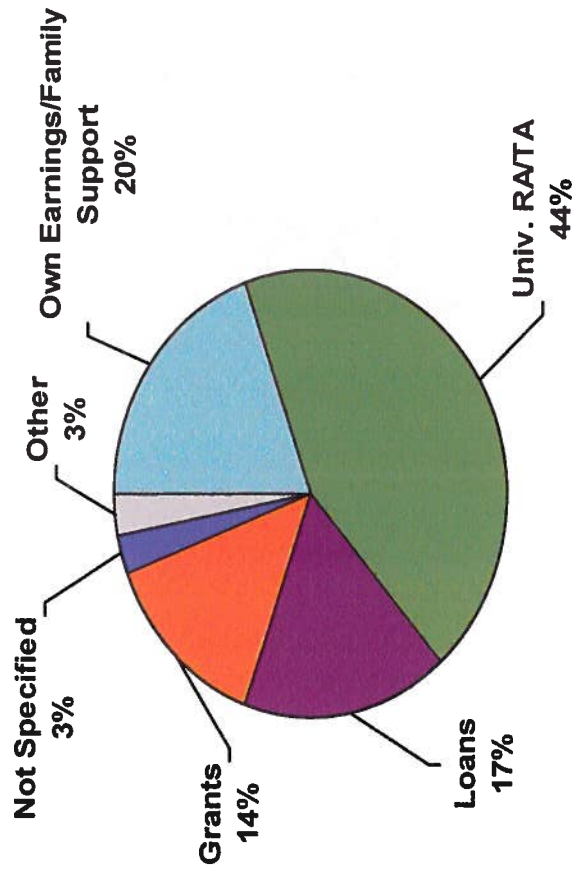


American Psychological Association

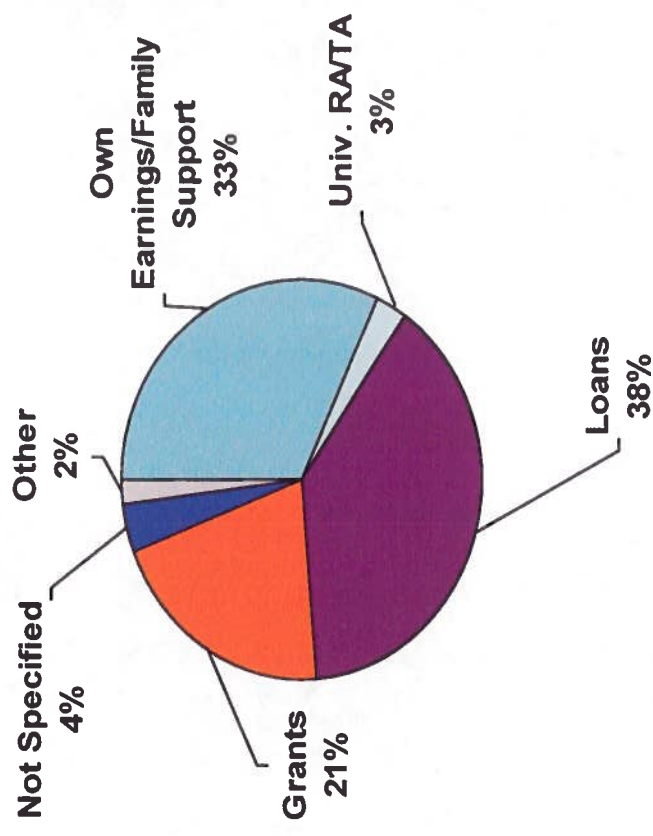


# Primary Sources of Financial Support for ECPs by Type of Degree: 2007

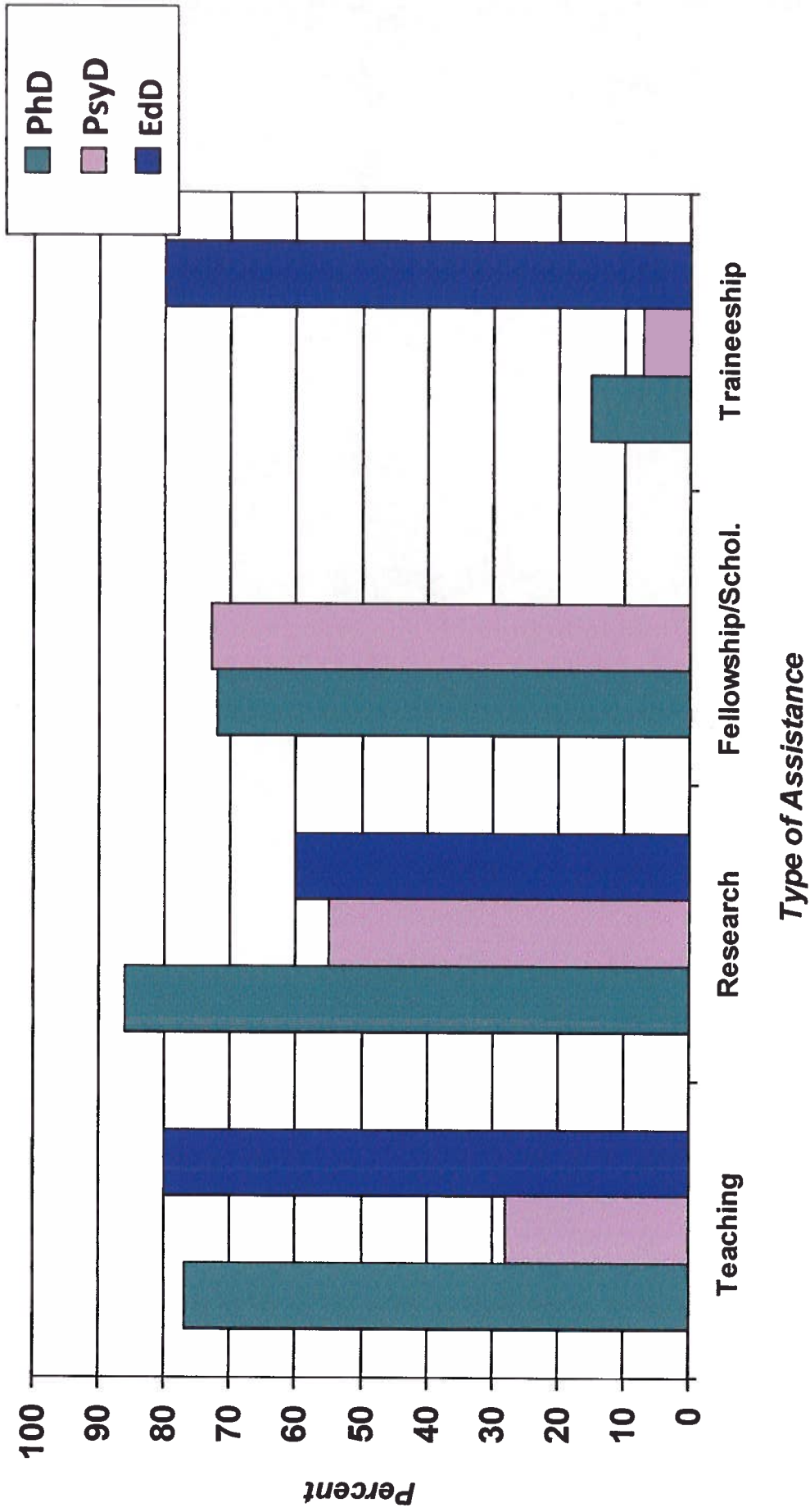
## PhD



## PsyD



# Availability of Assistance to First-Year Doctoral-level Psychology Students by Degree Type and Type of Assistance: 2008-2009



Source: 2010 Graduate Study in Psychology. Compiled by APA Center for Workforce Studies, March 2010.

# Financial Support and Debt Summary

- Those in HSP subfields complete their programs with debt at a higher proportion when compared to those in research and other subfields. Debt levels and financial support are functions of degree and subfield.
- Tuition costs and living expenses = highest contributors to debt
- HSP psychologists that do have debt report it at higher levels than non-HSP psychologists.
- In general, PhDs report lower debt levels than PsyDs.
- Overall, for those PhDs that do report debt, it is significantly less than PsyD debt.
- **Advice: Research available loan forgiveness/repayment programs!**