

Rationale for and Introduction of the Competencies for Counseling Psychology

The Benchmark Competencies for Professional Psychology (APA Education Directorate, 2013; Fouad et al., 2009) are well developed and broadly relevant for training in counseling psychology. By their very nature, the Benchmark Competencies provide a critical foundation for identifying competencies across all specialties. They are intended to serve as a template that can be modified as appropriate by training programs and that can be further specified to define the essential competencies of specialties (Campbell, Fouad, Grus, Hatcher, Leahy, & McCutcheon, 2013). In order to be of greatest use for counseling psychology training programs, specific emphases for counseling psychology are needed; e.g. in Essential Components, Behavioral Anchor examples, and the frequency of and degree to which certain competencies of the specialty might be expected to be demonstrated in counseling psychologists.

To address this need, the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP), the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs (CCPTP) and the Association of Counseling Center Training Agencies (ACCTA) formed a cooperative Special Task Group (STG). The STG was charged with evaluating the extent to which the Benchmark Competencies meet unique Counseling Psychology training needs and to identify areas requiring further development. The members of the STG are listed in Appendix A.

The CPSY STG reviewed a variety of existing competencies documents to evaluate strengths and limitations to address the training needs in counseling psychology (refer to Appendix B). In our first teleconference meeting, we agreed that the Benchmark Competencies were largely consistent with counseling psychology training. We also noted that there are some specific competencies of particular importance that were not addressed. Therefore, we proposed to adapt the Benchmark Competencies (APA, 2011; Fouad et al., 2009) to specify counseling psychology competencies, including those shared with and distinct from those of general professional psychology. We recognize that there are multiple competencies being developed and promulgated in professional psychology, and our goal is not to add to that confusion. We have pulled common factors from those competencies (as described below), and integrated unique counseling psychology values to provide additional guidance for counseling psychology doctoral programs.

Benchmark Competencies (APA, 2011)

The organizational framework for the Benchmark Competencies includes six Clusters. The first two clusters - I. Professionalism and II. Relational comprise Foundational competencies. Foundational competencies reflect the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that provide a foundation to support the development and skills of a psychologist (Fouad et al., 2009). The remaining four clusters comprise Functional competencies, which include the major tasks or functions that a psychologists must be able to perform, based on the integration of the foundational competencies. The four clusters of functional competences are III. Science, IV. Application, V. Education, and VI. Systems.

A total of 17 Core competencies are subsumed under these six Clusters. Each Core competency is further defined by Essential Components; e.g., under the first Cluster of I. Professionalism, the first Core competency is 1. Professional Values and Attitudes, under which are defined the Essential Components of 1A. Integrity, 1B. Deportment, 1C. Accountability, 1D. Concern for the Welfare of Others, and 1E. Professional Identity. Under each Essential Component are defined Indicators for demonstrating achieved competency at each of three developmental levels of training and preparation: Readiness for Practicum, Readiness for Internship, and Readiness for Entry to Practice. Finally, under the Indicators at each developmental level, examples of Behavioral Anchors are described.

Competencies STG Process

As noted above, the thoroughness and complexity of the Benchmark Competencies encompasses much of the doctoral training in counseling psychology. However, the STG also identified three areas of particular importance to counseling psychology that were not represented in any existing competency documents: social justice, prevention, and vocational psychology (See Initial Report in Appendix C).

In response to this finding, the STG met pre-conference at the CCPTP Midwinter meeting in February 2013. In addition to the APA Benchmark Competencies, the STG relied heavily on recent documents that reflect changes in the practice of professional psychology, including the Blueprint for Education and Training produced by the APA Health Service Psychology Education Collaborative (HSPEC) and the *Core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice* (Interprofessional Education Collaborative, 2011). Of particular importance were several documents that support the unique values and training goals of Counseling Psychology. These include Ted Packard's 2009 article on the core values of counseling psychology; the Model Training Program in Counseling Psychology documents developed by Murdock, Alcorn, Heesacker and Stoltenberg (1998); the Counseling Psychology Model Training Values Statement Addressing Diversity (2006), endorsed by ACCTA, CCPTP, and SCP; the Guidelines for Integration of Vocational Psychology into Professional Psychology Practice (Society of Vocational Psychology, 2010); and the Prevention Guidelines (Prevention Section, n.d.).

Proposed Counseling Psychology Competencies

Based on these broad readings, as well as the activities and experiences of STG members who represent diverse training backgrounds and stages of professional development, the STG engaged in a process that resulted in the Counseling Psychology Competencies document. That process included examining the existing competency benchmarks and identifying the key areas that needed to be added or infused across counseling psychology competencies. We then prioritized the emerging competencies, using a card sort process wherein each of the STG members ranked the competencies and identified them as either foundational or function. This process resulted in a list that contained both existing competencies (as articulated in the APA benchmarks) and new areas identified as critical to Counseling Psychology. From this process, we have formulated specific foundational and functional competencies necessary for any

counseling psychology doctoral student to both identify as and fully function as a counseling psychologist. It is critical to note that the Counseling Psychology competencies are consistent with the Benchmark Competencies for Professional Psychology (APA, 2011). There are no competencies that negate or undermine any Benchmark Competencies. Instead, the Counseling Psychology Competencies include the additional areas described above, which are central to counseling psychology values, and also infuse diversity, social justice, and evidence-based practice across all other competency areas.

The Counseling Psychology competencies are organized into three clusters: Foundational, Functional, and Organizational. There are seven Foundational Core Competencies: Professional Identity, Relationships, Individual and Cultural Diversity, Professional Values and Attitudes, Reflective Practice, Scientific Knowledge, and Ethical & Legal standards. There are six Functional Competencies: Advocacy, Intervention, Supervision, Assessment, Research & Evaluation, and Teaching, all of which are assumed to be anchored in Evidence-based Practice (EBP). The Core Competencies of the Organizational cluster include Systems, Consultation, and Management.

The Counseling Psychology competencies are also consistent with the Benchmark Competencies (APA, 2011) in that they are organized by level of training: Readiness for Practicum, Readiness for Internship, and Readiness for Practice. These developmental levels specify the minimum skills and competencies to proceed to the identified level of training.

Program implementation of the Counseling Psychology Competencies

Programs who adopt these competencies may choose to assess or evaluate the competencies at multiple points in training, including prior to those developmental markers. The sequence of training will vary by program, depending on several factors including whether admission occurs before or after completion of a Master's degree. Therefore, the timing of developmental assessment points will be determined by the program.

Summary of key events completed by the STG:

January, 2012	STG is formed by vote of the SCP Executive Board and SCP Co-Chair is named (Cindy Juntunen)
February, 2012	CCPTP Executive Board supports STG formation and nominates CCPTP Co-Chair (Margo Jackson)
February, 2012	Formation and goals of STG is announced to CCPTP membership at Mid-Winter meeting
March – May, 2012	All STG members are identified and invited to participate
July, 2012	STG has first meeting; identifies goals for development of Counseling Psychology competencies
August, 2012	SCP and CCPTP Executive Boards approve continued work of the STG
February, 2013	STG holds meeting and develops new competency areas; introduces framework to CCPTP members at mid-winter meeting and solicits feedback
April 17, 2013	Public comment period on draft Competencies announced on CCPTP, DIV17, ACCTA and SAS listservs
May 7, 2013	Second notice of public comment posted to listservs
May 20, 2013	First public comment period closed
June 10, 2013	Second Public Comment period opened for revised draft and announcements sent to above listservs
June 24, 2013	Second Public Comment period closed
July 30, 2013	SCP approved the Counseling Psychology competencies

Appendix A

STG members

MaryAnn Covey, Texas A & M Counseling Center, representing ACCTA
Nadya Fouad, U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, representing SCP
Margo Jackson, Fordham, representing CCPTP (co-Chair of STG)
Cindy Juntunen, U of North Dakota, representing SCP (co-Chair of STG)
Eric Sauer, Western Michigan, representing CCPTP
Sally Stabb, Texas Woman's, representing CCPTP
Femina Varghese, Central Arkansas, representing SCP
Emily Voelkel, U of Houston, representing SAS

Appendix B

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APPENDIX C

Report on Initial Meeting of the SCP/CCPTP STG on Counseling Psychology Competencies

The Special Task Group on Counseling Psychology Competencies was authorized by SCP Executive Board vote in January, 2012 and by CCPTP Executive Board vote in February, 2012. Committee members were identified and solicited throughout the Spring of 2012. Ultimately, eight members were appointed in May, 2012:

Margo Jackson, PhD, Co-Chair for CCPTP
Cindy Juntunen, PhD, Co-Chair for SCP
Mary Ann Covey, PhD
Nadya Fouad, PhD
Eric Sauer, PhD
Sally Stabb, PhD
Femina Varghese, PhD
Emily Voelkel, MA (SAS representative)

Initial work of the group began in June, 2012, with a series of organizational emails. All members were provided with preparatory materials, including the APA Foundational and Functional Competencies, the Health Service Psychology competencies (under development), the Division 12 Task Force on Clinical Training Principles, and several related documents.

The STG met via conference call on Tuesday, July 17, 2012. Consensus arose during that meeting around the key charge of the STG, which was to determine whether the existing competencies were adequate guidance for Counseling Psychology training programs.

Findings

The existing competencies (as defined in the APA competencies document and the Health Service Psychology competencies currently under development) capture the broad competencies expected of counseling psychology graduates. However, the STG members identified a lack of attention to exemplars and emphasis on competencies unique to Counseling Psychology. These included limited representation of vocational, prevention, developmental, strength-based, and advocacy interventions; a restricted range of expectations for Individual and Cultural Diversity competencies, and little guidance on the developmental sequence most appropriate for Counseling Psychology students.

Next Steps

The members of the STG were unanimous in their belief that additional work is necessary to provide appropriate guidance for Counseling Psychology programs to adopt and use the competencies benchmarks. With that in mind, the STG plans to meet again via electronic means, and would also like to schedule one weekend work meeting. The sequence of work is as follows:

1. Assign competency areas to pairs of STG members to identify specific additions or concerns (August – September, 2012)
2. Bring all members together for a 2-day work meeting in order to generate ideas, solidify outcomes, and complete a significant portion of the writing and related work (October, 2012)
3. Assign tasks for each pair to follow up on after work meeting, then meet as group via teleconference to finalize document (November, 2012)
4. Make document available for public comment (prior to mid-winter meetings, so either December, 2012 or January, 2013).
5. Seek input from Education and Training Community during mid-winter meetings (NMCS, SCP, CCPTP) and integrate that input into document (March – April, 2013)
6. Prepare final document for presentation to the SCP and CCPTP Executive Boards (June, 2013) for review at APA, 2013.