

Recommendations for Doctoral Education and Training in Family Psychology

This document provides a framework for doctoral education and training in family psychology. Family psychology is a specialty recognized by the Commission for the Recognition of Specialties in Professional Psychology (CRSPP). The Committee on Accreditation (CoA) of the American Psychological Association is currently debating the accreditation of doctoral programs in emerging specialty areas, but this document takes no position on the issue of doctoral vs. post-doctoral delineation of family psychology specialty status. Rather, a model for doctoral education and training is provided that recognizes the importance of the inclusion of family psychology at the doctoral level. If specialty designation is confined to the post-doctoral level, these recommendations delineate the nature and structure of a pre-specialty emphasis in family psychology within a clinical, counseling, or school psychology program; if family psychology specialty designation is approved at the doctoral level, these recommendations provide a framework for programs that may wish to identify themselves as family psychology doctorates. The current description of post-doctoral programs in family psychology (Kaslow, Gottlieb, Grossman, & Turner, 2003) notes that the knowledge and skills necessary for competence in family psychology are substantial, and likely to require more than a one-year post-doctoral program. Consequently, graduates of doctoral programs in family psychology could enter post-doctoral programs in family psychology with advanced standing. In that sense, these recommendations provide a bridge between generalist education and training in psychology and specialization in family psychology.

It is important that family psychology be understood as a fundamental orientation to psychology. It is a systemic epistemology that requires a paradigm shift from many

contemporary individualistic psychological perspectives. It is much more than an emphasis on the treatment of couples or families. Family psychology advocates that the understanding of human behavior, psychological assessment, and intervention must be based upon a systemic perspective.

The recommendations in this document are based upon the framework (domains) and text of the Guidelines and Principles for the Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology of the CoA of the American Psychological Association (G&P). The G&P provide standards for accreditation of doctoral programs in psychology and family psychology programs should be designed to meet these standards. In some cases the exact wording of the G&P are used in order to ensure continuity of meaning across documents.

Domain A: Eligibility

As a prerequisite for accreditation, the program's purpose must be within the scope of the accrediting body and must be pursued in an institutional setting appropriate for the doctoral education and training of professional psychologists.

1. The program offers doctoral education and training, one goal of which is to prepare students for the science and practice of professional psychology within the specialty field of family psychology. The systemic training provided in the program allows professional activity in a wide variety of systems and settings such as mental health agencies, in both clinical and administrative positions; independent practice; organized health care, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals and other health settings (working collaboratively with physicians); legal and judicial settings (family forensic psychology); school settings (serving as consultants to the family or the school);

- universities and colleges in academic or training positions; or in public service (as advocates, clinicians or administrators).
2. The program is sponsored by an institution of higher education accredited by a nationally recognized regional accrediting body in the United States, or in the case of Canadian programs, the institution is publicly recognized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada as a member in good standing.
 3. The program is aligned with the mission of the academic department, college, school, or institution in which it resides. Programs in family psychology may be housed in departments of psychology; in departments located within schools or colleges of education; or in schools of medicine or psychiatry. Regardless of the organizational structure or setting, the program must have a critical mass of students, a sufficient number of full-time faculty (trained in systems thinking) to implement the program and mentor students, facilities that are adequate to carry out the educational and training mission of the program and a continuing budget that is sufficient to support the program.
 4. The program requires of each student a minimum of 3 full-time academic years of graduate study (or the equivalent thereof) and completion of a one-year internship prior to awarding the doctoral degree
 5. The program gives a high priority to actions that indicate respect for and understanding of cultural and individual diversity (e.g. age, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, physical challenge, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social economic status). Respect for and understanding of cultural and individual diversity is reflected in the program's policies for the recruitment, retention, and

development of faculty and students, and in its curriculum and field placements. The program has nondiscriminatory policies and operating conditions, and it avoids any actions that would restrict program access or completion on grounds that are irrelevant to success in graduate training or the profession.

6. Formal written policies and procedures govern the operation of the program and these policies are consistent with those of its sponsoring university as well as with those guidelines of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States that pertain to faculty and student rights, responsibilities, and personal development.

Domain B: Program Philosophy, Objectives and Curriculum Plan

The program has a clearly specified philosophy of education and training, compatible with the mission of its sponsor institution, and appropriate to the science and practice of family psychology. The program's education and training model and its curriculum plan are consistent with this philosophy.

B.1. Program Philosophy

Historical Background

Psychologists have recognized the importance of family psychology within the larger field of psychology since the late 1950s with the formation at an APA convention of the Academy of Psychologists in Marriage Counseling and with the publication in the early 1960s of the *Journal of Psychologists in Marriage Counseling* (Philpot, 1994). However, it wasn't until 1979 that the American Board of Family Psychology (an ABPP board) was created to award diplomates in family psychology. Shortly thereafter, Division 43, the Division of Family Psychology, was approved by APA Council at the 1984 Convention. Bringing the history of family psychology as an entity within psychology to the most recent

past, in 2002, Family Psychology was approved as a specialty by the Council for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP). During the interim years, it has become clear that interest in doctoral training in psychology is keen. A number of studies have reflected the widespread interest in this specialty. For example, a 1990 survey of 115 APA-accredited psychology training programs suggested that family psychology is seen as having significant values by the participating programs and their students. Of the 39 specialty clinics housed within the 115 programs, 63% identified with family therapy, making it the most popular type of service and 53% had marital/couples therapy treatment service, making it the fourth most popular type of service (Sayette & Mayne, 1990). Of 100 research areas in clinical psychology doctoral programs, the topics of family research, family therapy, and family systems ranked second only to behavioral medicine in terms of the number of graduate departments involved (43%) and the number of faculty participating. In a 1994 survey of APA-accredited programs in clinical psychology, almost one-fifth of all clinical psychology faculty members indicated their theoretical orientation to be systems or family systems making it the third most widely embraced orientation (Mayne, Norcross & Sayette, 1994). Psychology and psychologists were clearly hungry for training in family psychology!

Several years before the actual CRSPPP application was developed, eminent psychologists within Division 43 were writing about the distinctiveness of the philosophy behind family psychology (Weeks & Nixon, 1991; Weeks, Nixon, Kaslow, Gottlieb & Sauber, 1988, Williams, Kaslow & Grossman, 1994). Many of these writings formed the platform on which the CRSPPP application was written: “Family psychology represents a significant conceptual leap in the field of psychology. Traditionally, psychologists have

focused on the individual as the unit of study. Family psychologists focus on the individual in the context of intimate others. They see the individual within a social system which means their thinking and interventions are relational and contextual in nature. In this respect the family psychologist is a systems thinker. The individual system (the individual), the interactional system (the couple), and the intergenerational systems (family-of-origin) are all related and exert reciprocal influences on each other. Viewing the individual within the interlocking nature of these systems results in a more holistic, comprehensive, and multi-determined theory of human functioning.” (Weeks & Nixon, 1991, p. 9)

The distinctive philosophy of the field of family psychology rather the type of client or population served is what differentiates it from other specialties within psychology. Key aspects of that philosophy include:

- Making a paradigm shift from an intrapsychic and individual conceptualization to a systemic conceptualization is necessary.
- Systemic conceptualization: the focus is on individuals, couples, families and other systems (communities, cultural groups, nations, school systems, medical systems, legal systems etc.) as they operate within the various systems within which they are embedded.
- Patterned interactions within these systems are key to working from a family psychology perspective.
- The client may be an individual (whose presenting problems are considered within the larger systemic perspective) or any larger system (whether it be a couple, a family or another type of system). Thus, “[r]egardless of the number of clients being treated,

the family psychologist conceptualizes problems in terms of systems perspective”
(Weeks & Nixon, 1991, p. 10).

- The types of problems being treated may not be different from those treated by other professional psychologists. What differs is the conceptualization of the problem. Psychological problems are conceptualized in terms of how the symptom was created and maintained and how it affects others with whom the client interacts and to whom the client relates.
- Some problem areas are more commonly treated by family psychologists, for example those focusing specifically on intimate or family relationships, whether a single or multiple clients are being treated.
- The skills needed to be a family psychologist include individual psychotherapeutic approaches as well as specific techniques in sex, marital and family and divorce therapy all grounded in a systems approach to conceptualization and intervention. Special assessment approaches and instruments are also the purview of the family psychologist.
- Systemic conceptualizations also require special attention to ethical issues which must be dealt with somewhat differently than with more intrapersonal approaches

B.2. Education and Training Outcome Competencies

The program specifies education and training objectives in terms of the competencies expected of its graduates. For family psychology programs, those competencies must be consistent with the philosophy of family psychology (see B1). Systemic competencies are based upon the principles and concepts of systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1950, 1974). Systems theory suggests that to adequately understand human behavior in real-life contexts, one must

pay attention to the variety of factors that influence life in a system and the interaction between those factors. A systemic epistemology provides a framework for conceptualizing, assessing, structuring a professional relationship, and intervening in a variety of psychological circumstances.

Competencies in family psychology include entry level readiness in research/critical analysis of issues and critical thinking, professional relationship, assessment, intervention, diversity, supervision, consultation, education, and professional practice management.

Research/Critical Thinking: understanding and utilization of a systemic epistemology for the analysis and psychological treatment of human behavior.

Professional Relationship: ability to establish and maintain a working alliance with individuals in dyadic, family, or group professional relations.

Assessment: adoption of a systemic conceptualization of assessment and the ability to utilize individual assessment for interpersonal intervention processes; to assess interpersonal dynamics; to assess the context of individual, dyadic, family, or group process; and to select assessment methods appropriate to individual differences and cultural diversity in systems.

Intervention: ability to conceptualize interventions systemically and to utilize evidence-based systemic interventions that are targeted to specific points of intervention in the system.

Diversity: knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the application of systemic competencies to diverse populations in diverse service environments.

Supervision: knowledge and skill in the provision of supervision based upon models that utilize a systemic framework and include ethical standards for individual, dyadic, family, or group processes.

Consultation: capacity to use systemic competencies in larger social systems and organizations.

Education: ability to provide psychoeducation based upon systemic understanding of specific issues or concerns.

Professional Practice Management: ability to organize and administer psychological services to individuals, dyads, families, groups, or organizations in an ethical fashion.

B.3a. Core Areas of Psychology

The program's philosophy, educational model, and curriculum plan should be substantially consistent with the following principles of the discipline:

- a. Psychological practice is based on the science of psychology, which in turn, is influenced by the professional practice of psychology; and
- b. Training for practice is sequential, cumulative, graded in complexity and designed to prepare student for further organized training.

The program has a clear and coherent curriculum plan that provides the means whereby all students can acquire and demonstrate substantial understanding and competence in the breadth of scientific psychology, its history of thought and development, its research methods and its application. To achieve this end, students shall be exposed to the current body of knowledge in: biological aspects of behavior; cognitive and affective aspects of behavior; social aspects of behavior; history and systems of psychology; lifespan developmental psychology; multicultural and diversity issues; ethical and legal issues; psychological measurement; research methodology, and techniques of data analysis.

Because a well trained family psychologist is after all a well-trained psychologist, coursework in the core areas of psychology is a necessary component of any family

psychology training program. However, the systemic perspective of family psychology requires that training programs superimpose a family systems perspective onto content areas in the core areas of psychology. A course in biological bases of behavior, for example, would emphasize “understanding the principles of anatomy and physiology and the interaction between the biological and environmental (social) variables as determinants of behavior...Specific areas...most relevant to family psychology would be the effects of drugs and neuropsychological problems on family interactions, developmental disabilities, and organically-based psychological problems (Weeks & Nixon, 1993, p. 11). Core content in the program, thus, while addressing typical content area, weave in a consideration of how the knowledge from the core area is applied in family psychology.

Other examples of how family psychology programs approach the teaching of the core areas of psychology follow:

- Content in history and systems of psychology includes the history of family and systemic thinking and of the development of the field of family psychology.
- The program also includes content on lifespan human development with consideration given to both individual and family life cycle development.
- Because multicultural and diversity issues strongly affect not only the individual but the systems within which s/he is embedded, the program offers content in multicultural issues and diversity as defined in greater detail in Domain D. Considered within this content is each area of diversity defined in Domain D, including focus on gender and sexual orientation. Ideally, multiculturalism and diversity themes are reflected in each of the core and advanced content areas.

- Ethical and legal issues are studied and the special ethical and legal challenges which systemic work engenders are addressed.
 - Psychological measurement includes family and relational assessment along with more traditional psychological assessment tools.
 - Content on research methodology consider the inherent difficulties of studying systems and the methodological approaches best suited to the study of systems.
- Because qualitative approaches are particularly well-suited to the study of systems, the program includes qualitative research in any content areas on research methodology and qualitative data analysis strategies are taught in content areas in data analysis.

B.3b. Family Psychology Curriculum

In addition to broad training as a psychologist, family psychologists are expected to receive targeted training which focuses on the key areas of the discipline of family psychology.

These content areas are similar to those delineated for the post-doctoral programs in family psychology. The expectation is that individuals training in family psychology at the doctoral level in would need exposure to a similar corpus of knowledge as those training at the post-doctoral level. Consequently, graduates of family psychology doctoral programs would likely qualify for advanced standing in post-doctoral training. The content areas listed below are intended to provide the basic fund of information which a family psychologist should possess. Individual programs may divide the content areas listed below in separate courses or provide a more integrated curriculum featuring knowledge in the listed areas.

- History of family psychology, including its relationship to major systems of thought and practice in psychology as a discipline and related fields (including family

therapy). Coursework in this area is important because most students of psychology are not acquainted with the historical roots of family psychology and where the discipline fits in the context of the larger field.

- **Family Life Cycle.** Traditional approaches to developmental theories seldom consider the developmental stages through which a family goes and ignore the intersection between individual development and the lifecycle of the family.
- **Marital and Family Systems Theory,** including family dynamics, structures and functioning. A thorough understanding of the multiple “schools” of family therapy should be supplemented by an understanding about the functioning of different family forms, as few families today are comprised of two parents and 2.1 children.
- **Couple and Family Intervention Skills and Strategies.** Couples and families present challenging issues to clinicians. The ability to conceptualize and carry out interventions in complex couple and family systems is critical, as is understanding the functioning of couples and families from an ecosystemic perspective.
- **Assessment Issues in Family Psychology,** including special issues of systems assessment. Working with families and couples presents special assessment challenges. Clinical interview formats suitable for use with systems, family oriented instruments, semi-structured approaches such as genograms, lifestyle and birth order analyses and traditional psychological assessments applied in a systemic setting are all to be considered in this area.
- **Special Factors Affecting Family Functioning,** including divorce and remarriage, sexual dysfunction, chronic illness, adjustment to serious illness, injury to or death of a child, problems with infidelity, loss of employment, financial conflicts and other

- traumatic life events. Families and larger systems have become increasingly complex in their composition and functioning. A content area is necessary focusing on the wide variety of complex constellations and difficult presentations in these systems.
- Larger Systems, including an understanding of family functioning within larger systems, the applications of systems thinking to understanding the functioning of larger systems. Family psychologists are likely to be employed in larger systems and called upon to apply systems principles to those larger systems. When working with families, psychologists are also likely to encounter issues that center around larger systems which intersect with family functioning.
 - Sex Therapy. Family psychologists should be knowledgeable about and skilled in working within the normal range of sexual functioning as well as with sexual dysfunctions and issues.
 - Family Law. Understanding family law as it impacts the field of family psychology is an important component of training. Issues having to do with custody, parental competency, visitation, family forensic consulting are to be considered.
 - Family Research. Researching systems presents unusual methodological challenges. This content area should help bridge the gap between traditional methodologies suitable for understanding individual behavior and those appropriate to study systems of various sizes and compositions.
 - Educational Interventions, including psychoeducational strategies for intervening with families involved in the medical system, parenting interventions, marriage preparation and marriage enrichment. Family psychologists often are called upon to provide psychoeducational interventions to client families.

- Legal and Ethical Issues in Family Psychology including the special ethics of working with families and larger systems, legal constraints and issues of working with families, Working with families and larger systems requires a reexamination of legal and ethical issues of the mainstream discipline.
- Supervision and Consultation in Family Psychology. Special issues in doing supervision in family psychology and the consultation possibilities in the field are addressed.
- Administration Issues in Family Psychology. Family psychologists may be called upon to establish and/or direct family psychology programs in public, institutional and private settings.
- Program Evaluation. As more family psychologists work in agency settings which are supported by federal, state or foundation funding, they will need to be knowledgeable about program evaluation.

B.4 Clinical Training

The program requires that its students receive adequate and appropriate practicum experiences in family psychology. Students shall be placed in practicum sites that provide a wide range of training experiences based upon evidence-based family psychology interventions under the supervision of a sufficient number of family psychologists to ensure quality of training. The practicum experiences must be integrated into the doctoral program and there must be sufficient opportunity for discussion of the practicum in the educational program. The sequencing, duration, nature, and content of the practicum experiences must be consistent with the family psychology program's goals and outcome competency expectations. Developmental markers of achievement are provided to determine the level of

competency required for students to progress through levels of the program and to graduate from the program.

Domain C: Program Resources

C.1. Faculty

The program has a core faculty of psychologists who identify with family psychology and provide leadership to the program. These psychologists function as an integral part of the academic unit of which the program is an element.

The family psychology core faculty is sufficient in number to meet the academic and professional responsibilities associated with the program. They have theoretical perspectives, and academic and applied experiences appropriate to the goals and objectives of a family psychology program. They demonstrate substantial competence in family psychology through recognized indicators such as psychology licensure; research, presentations, and publications related to family psychology; membership and service in the APA Division of Family psychology; election as fellows of the APA Division of Family Psychology; diplomate status in family psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology; and/or other specialty-related recognitions.

The family psychology core faculty function as role models for students in the specialty area and they socialize students into the discipline of family psychology. Other adjunct faculty who identify with family psychology and have expertise in the specialty area may augment the core faculty in the provision of education and clinical training in family psychology.

C.2. Students

The program has an identifiable body of students at different levels of matriculation who are sufficient in number to ensure opportunities for meaningful peer interaction, support, and socialization as family psychologists. These students demonstrate interest, aptitude, and prior achievement at a level of quality appropriate for the program's goals and objectives in family psychology and they reflect the program's goals, objectives, and philosophy in their intellectual and professional development and intended career paths.

C.3. Institutional and External Resources

The program has the additional resources it needs and utilizes them to achieve its training goals and objectives. The program interacts with the institution of which it is a part to develop a plan for the acquisition of needed resources, including financial support for training and educational activities, clerical and technical support, training materials and equipment, physical facilities, student support services, and access to appropriate practicum training facilities that are congruent with the program goals and objectives in family psychology.

In some cases, a graduate program may exist under a consortium of institutional entities that have a formal agreement to pool resources to conduct the program.

Domain D: Cultural and Individual Differences and Diversity

The program recognizes the importance of cultural and individual differences and diversity in the training of psychologists

1. The specialty of Family psychology recognizes the centrality of issues of diversity in the training of professional psychologists. Our increasingly diverse society requires that students be trained to understand the multiplicity of cultural factors which impact

families and other systems. The systemic and multisystemic approach of family psychology puts culture in the forefront and students in family psychology are taught to consider cultural and individual differences within the larger systems within which they are embedded. Students are specifically taught to consider the cultural and systemic issues which may affect assessment and intervention strategies offered to families and their members. The impact of the family and that of larger systems on issues of culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical ability are emphasized in both academic and training activities throughout the degree program. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on understanding the role of culture and diversity on the development of individual and family belief systems which guide the work of the professional psychologist.

2. The specialty of family psychology attracts students who have a particular interest in issues of cultural and individual differences. Nonetheless, program faculty implement a thoughtful and coherent plan for recruiting and retaining a diverse student body. Likewise, program faculty also develop a plan for recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty.

Domain E: Student-Faculty Relations

The program demonstrates that its education, training, and socialization experiences are characterized by mutual respect and courtesy between students and faculty and that it operates in a manner that facilitates students' educational experiences.

The program recognizes the rights of students and faculty to be treated with courtesy and respect. All interactions between students, faculty, and staff should be collegial,

reflecting the highest standards of the psychology community. The program shows respect for cultural and individual diversity among students.

Program faculty are accessible to students and provide them with guidance and mentoring as professional role models to promote student acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with family psychology.

At the time of admission and throughout the program, the program provides the students with written policies and procedures regarding requirements and expectations of student performance, continuation in the program, and procedures for the termination of students. Students receive annual written feedback on the extent to which they are meeting program requirements and performance expectations. Feedback includes timely, written notification of problems and an opportunity to discuss them, remediation guidance, and indication of the extent to which corrective actions address the issues of concern.

The program maintains a record of all formal complaints and grievances filed against the program and/or individuals associated with the program.

Domain F: Program Self-Assessment and Quality Enhancement

The program demonstrates commitment to excellence through continuous self-study which meets the criteria of relevant academic and professional accrediting organizations. These organizations include (but are not limited to) those of nationally recognized regional accrediting associations and the American Psychological Association. Guidelines promulgated by other groups, such as the National Register of Health Service Providers, the Academy of Family Psychology, and state licensing boards, may also inform program development.

1. The program, with appropriate involvement from its students, engages in regular, ongoing self-studies that address:
 - a. its effectiveness in achievement program goals and objectives (i.e. its outcomes)
 - b. how its goals and objectives are met through graduate education and professional training (i.e., its processes); and
 - c. its procedures to maintain current achievements or to make program changes as necessary.

2. The program demonstrates commitment to excellence through periodic systemic reviews of its goals and objectives, training model, and curriculum to ensure their appropriateness in relation to:
 - a. its sponsor institution's mission and goals;
 - b. local, regional, and national needs for psychological services;
 - c. national standards of professional practice;
 - d. the evolving body of scientific and professional knowledge that serves as the basis of practice; and
 - e. its graduates' job placements and career paths.

3. Family psychology programs monitor education and training outcomes through feedback from affiliated agencies that accept students for practicum and internship placements. In addition, follow-up surveys of graduate and regular feedback from students and faculty comprise important components of the evaluative process. Job placements of graduates and state licensing examination pass rates also provide

important feedback. There is evidence through program modification that evaluative data are being used in program planning and implementation.

Domain G: Public Disclosure

The family psychology program demonstrates its commitment to public disclosure by providing written materials and other communications that appropriately represent it to the relevant publics.

The program is described accurately and completely in documents that are available to current students, prospective students, and other members of the public. The description of the program should include: its goals, objectives, and training model; its requirements for admission and graduation; its curriculum; its faculty, students, facilities, and other resources; its administrative policies and procedures; the kinds of research and practicum experiences it provides; its education and training outcomes; and its status with regard to accreditation. This information should be presented in a manner that allows informed decisions about the program.

Domain H: Relationship with Accrediting Body

The program demonstrates its commitment to the accreditation process by fulfilling its responsibilities to the accrediting body from which its accredited status is granted.

1. The program abides by the accrediting body's published policies and procedures, including the filing of reports in a timely manner. In addition, the program informs the accrediting body of changes in conditions that may affect the quality of training.
2. To remain current with accreditation procedures and other developments in the field of family psychology, program representatives participate in relevant organizations

such as the APA Division of Family Psychology, and where relevant the Academy of Family Psychology.

3. One or more program faculty complete the training necessary to become a member of the accreditation site-visitor pool.