

Employer and Alumni Ratings
Linking Performance-Based Assessment to School Psychology Training

School Psychology Program
December 2001

Lynne Blennerhassett, Ed.D., NCSP
Director, School Psychology Program
Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

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The School Psychology at Gallaudet University has been accredited through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) since initiating the procedure in 1986. Accreditation standards challenge training programs to evaluate their effectiveness not only through grades and requirements for graduation, but also by conducting on-job performance assessment of graduates. Performance-based assessment of graduates provides the program valuable data for guiding course revisions and future program development.

What follows is a report of employer and graduate ratings of on-job performance in the delivery of school psychology services. Two surveys were sent to each of the 134 alumni who graduated on or before 1999, and were credentialed to work as school psychologists. The first survey, the *Gallaudet School Psychology Graduate Survey*, was an alumni checklist requesting basic demographic data, employment background, and evaluation of professional preparation. A five-point Likert-type scale was provided, allowing graduates to rate their performance from Very Competent to Sufficiently Competent to Incompetent. Alumni were asked to forward the second survey, the *Checklist of Program Graduate's Performance*, to their immediate supervisor. Employers were asked to rate the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of the graduate in the work setting. A four-point Likert-type rating scale was provided, allowing ratings of Excellent, Good, Average, or Below Average. A final rating of Not Observed was also available to employers. To protect anonymity, returned surveys contained only basic demographic information about the graduate and the work setting.

Alumni Survey Results

Alumni Practitioners Compared to the National Profile of School Psychology Practitioners

Surveys were returned from 84 graduates, representing a 62.7% response rate. Table 1 describes the characteristics of alumni respondents compared to the national profile of school psychology practitioners described by Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker (1999) and Reschly (2000).

Program graduates resembled the national profile of school psychology practitioners regarding gender, years of experience, and salary. Despite efforts to recruit males, the profession and program remain approximately 70% female, 30% male. The distribution of years in the profession was spread fairly evenly with about 45% relatively new (1 to 10 years) and 55% more established (11-plus years experience). Annual salary distributions were similar between alumni and professional peers, with about one-third earning salaries of more than \$50,000, about half earning between \$25,000 to \$50,000. The program fared slightly better than the profession regarding ethnic/racial diversity, with 10.6% non-white representation in the alumni sample compared to 3.6% non-white representation within the profession at large.

Table 1. Alumni Characteristics Compared to National Profile of School Psychologists

Characteristic	% Gallaudet Alumni Sample	% National Profile of School Psychologists
Gender		
Female	70.2	73.4
Male	29.8	26.6
Ethnic/Racial Identification		
White	86.9	94.5
Black, Not Hispanic	5.9	1.0
Hispanic	3.5	1.7
Asian-Pacific	1.2	0.9
Native American/Alaskan	0.0	0.7
Other	3.5	1.2
Years of Experience		
1 to 5	25.0	21.1
6 to 10	19.0	22.8
11 to 15	33.3	23.0
16 to 20	21.4	18.4
More than 20	Not applicable	14.7
Salary		
Less than \$25,000	11.9	14.2
More than \$50,000	30.9	33.8

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some respondents left items blank.

Unique Characteristics of Alumni Practitioners

Because the Gallaudet School Psychology Program offers unique additional training in serving deaf and hard of hearing students, and because it recruits deaf and hard of hearing candidates to the profession, alumni demographic data included unique descriptive categories. Table 2 shows unique characteristics of the Gallaudet alumni practitioners, for which no national comparative data are available for the profession at large.

Table 2. Unique Characteristics of Alumni Sample Respondents

Characteristic	% Gallaudet Alumni Sample
Hearing Status	
Hearing	71.4
Deaf	17.8
Hard of Hearing	8.3
Population Served	
Regular Education Setting with Hearing Students Only	17.8
Regular Education Setting that includes Deaf/HoH Students	30.9
Residential School for the Deaf	20.2
Day School for the Deaf	7.1
Other	19.0
Does Not Apply	3.5

Terms of Service	
Full-time	78.5
Part-time	9.5
Free-lance/Consultant	3.5

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some respondents left items blank.

Unique to Gallaudet alumni is diversity reflected in the representation of professionals who are deaf and hard of hearing. About one-quarter of alumni identify themselves as deaf (17.8%) or hard of hearing (8.3%). Most alumni (58.2%) serve deaf and hard of hearing students and their families in mainstream, residential, or special day school programs. Only 17.8% of program graduates work exclusively with hearing students in regular education settings (an employment option open to them as certified school psychologists). About half (53.5%) of alumni practitioners indicated working in northeast and southern regions of the country, with western (17.8%) and north central (15.4%) regions less represented. Almost 10% of alumni serve international or other (e.g. territorial) programs. Most (78.5%) work full-time, although part-time and free-lance consultation service was reported by 13.0% of alumni practitioners.

School Psychology Services and Competency Ratings of Alumni Practitioners

Program graduates were asked to identify the types of service they provide and the level of competence they bring to various tasks. Table 3 summarizes the nature and frequency of school psychology services performed by graduates working in the field. Services related to child study and teacher consultation were dominant among categories, with only occasional direct counseling of students. Parent consultation, an emerging area of professional interest, was frequently performed by 41.6 percent of alumni, and occasionally performed by 45.2%, supporting the importance of this professional role.

Table 3. Percent of Alumni Performing Specified School Psychology Services

Nature of Services Performed	Frequently Performed	Occasionally Performed	Not Perform
Evaluation of Individual Children	72.6	14.2	4.2
Consultation with Teachers/Staff	71.4	29.7	2.3
Consultation/Counseling with Parents	41.6	45.2	5.9
Counseling Students	13.0	46.2	38.1

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some respondents left items blank.

Table 4 summarizes the level of competency graduates expressed regarding the knowledge and skills they possess for delivery of specific school psychology services. Most alumni feel confident in the knowledge and skills they possess related to professional, legal, and ethical issues and direct services (e.g., assessment, consultation, teaming, and scheduling). Confidence working with deaf, hard of hearing, and regular education students was also evidenced. However, graduates expressed less confidence in their knowledge and skills related to functional behavioral assessment (FBA), managing behavior problems, and working with exceptionalities other than deafness.

Table 4. Percent Alumni Competence Self-Ratings Across Knowledge and Skill Domains

Assessment of Knowledge and Skills	Very Competent		Sufficiently Competent		Incompetent
Knowledge of Legal and Ethical Issues	34.5	40.4	22.6	1.2	---
Knowledge of Professional Issues	35.7	33.3	26.1	2.3	---
Skill in Administering a Variety of Tests	66.6	27.4	3.5	1.2	---
Skill in Admin. Informal Assessments	29.7	36.9	23.8	4.7	1.2

Interpreting Test/Assessment Results	41.6	44.0	8.3	1.1	---
Functional Behavioral Assessments	5.9	14.2	23.8	19.0	5.9
Managing Behavior Problems	11.9	35.7	30.9	17.8	1.2
Formulating Diagnostic Plans/Objectives	15.4	36.9	32.1	10.7	3.5
Identifying Outside Resources	16.7	38.1	33.3	9.5	---
Consultation and Teaming	39.3	34.5	21.4	3.5	---
Working with Deaf/HoH Students	65.5	28.6	6.0	---	---
Working with Other Exceptionalities	8.3	39.3	32.1	16.7	1.2
Working with Regular Ed. Students	21.4	36.9	27.4	9.5	1.2
Personal Organization/Scheduling Skills	20.2	38.0	30.9	3.5	---

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some respondents left items blank.

Graduates also responded to open-ended questions regarding program strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included professional preparation, application of the scientist-practitioner model, assessment courses, deafness specialization training, personal supervision in practicum courses, quality and availability of professors, and collaboration/community with peers and professors. Weaknesses were noted in coursework related to FBA, behavior management, hands-on consultation and counseling, and educational curriculum. Graduates also suggested that the program curriculum felt too rushed, offered too few electives, and suffered from “Gallaudet as the center of the universe of deafness” orientation. Courses in crisis intervention and parent consultation/counseling were recommended.

Employer Survey Results

Surveys were returned from 50 employers, representing a 59.5% response rate based on the pool of 84 graduates who responded. The employers represented graduates with the following characteristics. Most (64.0%) held the credential of Specialist in School Psychology, the degree conferred upon program graduates after the year 1990. About one-third (36.0%) held Masters plus CAGS (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies), the credentials conferred upon graduates prior to 1990. About half (56.0%) were relatively new school psychologists with six or fewer years of experience in the field. Eighteen percent (18.0%) had 6 to 10 years work experience, and 24% had 11 or more years experience practicing school psychology.

Employer Ratings of Alumni Practitioners’ Knowledge and Skills

Employers were asked to rate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of program graduates working within their systems. Performance-based objectives were identified within six major knowledge and skill domains: Child Study, Specific Assessment, Behavioral Approaches, Counseling and Consultation, In-service and Outreach, and Procedures and Standards.

Table 5 presents performance-based assessment of knowledge and skills needed in the domain of Child Study. The vast majority (84% to 96%) employers rated program alumni as excellent or good across a range of areas related to child study. Even among the most challenging areas (report writing, report recommendations, report integration, referrals), the predominant ratings were average or above.

Table 5. Child Study Domain: Percent Employers Rating of Graduates’ On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Identification of Problem	72.0	24.0	4.0	---	---
Formulation of Diagnostic Plan	56.0	32.0	8.0	2.0	---
Selection of Evaluation Devices	70.0	24.0	6.0	---	---
Integration of Report	70.0	20.0	6.0	4.0	---
Report Recommendations	60.0	30.0	6.0	4.0	---

Quality of Report Writing	64.0	22.0	4.0	8.0	2.0
Appropriate Referrals	70.0	14.0	14.0	2.0	---

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Employers also rated skills associated with the specific assessment, the results of which are summarized in Table 6. Assessment systems most frequently used by alumni practitioners include Wechsler Intelligence Scales, Kaufman Intelligence Scales, adaptive behavior measures, personality and social-emotional measures, Bender-Gestalt and perceptual-motor tests, and tests of academic achievement. Most employers rated program alumni as excellent or good in knowledge and skill related to these individual assessment techniques. Although program graduates receive training in the use of newer assessment systems such as the UNIT and CAS, 70% to 80% of employment settings offered no opportunity to observe these skills. Similarly, assessments using tests developed specifically for deaf students (Meadow-Kendall and CID) were not among the systems observed in most employment settings.

Table 6. Specific Assessment: Percent Employers Rating of Graduates' On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Curriculum-Based Assessment	18.0	26.0	14.0	4.0	36.0
Use of Wechsler Intelligence Scales	74.0	10.0	2.0	---	12.0
Use of Kaufman Intelligence Scales	38.0	20.0	4.0	---	36.0
Use of Stanford-Binet IV Intelligence Scale	20.0	16.0	6.0	2.0	50.0
Use of CID Preschool Performance Scale	10.0	14.0	4.0	---	68.0
Use of Cognitive Assessment System (CAS)	8.0	6.0	---	---	80.0
Use of Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT)	10.0	2.0	---	2.0	70.0
Use of Adaptive Behavior Measures	48.0	26.0	6.0	2.0	16.0
Use of the Meadow-Kendall	26.0	14.0	---	2.0	54.0
Use of Personality and Social-Emotional Measures	46.0	24.0	10.0	2.0	14.0
Use of the Draw-A-Person Test	38.0	18.0	2.0	2.0	34.0
Use of Kinetic Family Drawing Test	24.0	18.0	2.0	2.0	48.0
Use of Bender-Gestalt	44.0	16.0	2.0	2.0	32.0
Use of Perceptual-Motor Tests	50.0	28.0	4.0	2.0	14.0
Use of Language Tests	40.0	28.0	8.0	2.0	20.0
Use of Academic Tests	46.0	28.0	4.0	4.0	14.0

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Knowledge and skills in behavior management constitute an essential service domain for school psychologists. Table 7 represents employer ratings of graduate performance regarding behavioral approaches. As was noted in child study and specific assessment domains, most employers (68% to 84%) rated alumni as excellent or good in FBA, behavior management, and behavioral recommendations to teachers.

Table 7. Behavioral Approaches: Percent Employers Rating of Graduates' On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)	36.0	32.0	18.0	---	14.0
Behavior Rating Scales/BASC/CBCC/Achenbach	12.0	---	6.0	---	---
Developing Behavior Management Plans	46.0	30.0	10.0	4.0	10.0
Recommendations to Teachers	48.0	36.0	10.0	4.0	2.0
Practicality of Recommendations to Teachers	52.0	30.0	12.0	4.0	2.0

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Knowledge and skills in counseling and consultation also represent a significant service domain of school psychologists. Employer ratings of alumni performance objectives within these areas are presented in Table 8. As with other performance domains, most employers issued ratings of excellent and good regarding range of skills (consultation, conferencing, interviewing, and counseling) and clients served (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other specialists).

Opportunities for individual counseling were noted in 88% of the employment settings, although group counseling opportunities were observed in only 54% of settings.

Table 8. Counseling/Consultation Domain: Percent Employers Rating of Graduates' On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Individual Counseling with Students	48.0	22.0	16.0	2.0	12.0
Group Counseling with Students	24.0	20.0	8.0	2.0	46.0
Child Interview	70.0	16.0	8.0	2.0	4.0
Parent Interview	68.0	22.0	8.0	---	2.0
Teacher Interview	70.0	18.0	10.0	---	2.0
Administrative Interview	64.0	20.0	12.0	---	4.0
Teacher Consultation	66.0	16.0	14.0	2.0	2.0
Parent Conferencing	68.0	14.0	14.0	4.0	---
Conferencing with Other Specialists	64.0	22.0	10.0	2.0	2.0

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

In-service and outreach activities represent another domain of school psychology services. Table 9 presents employer ratings of performance-based assessment of graduates in these areas. Although in-service to parents, students, and the community was not observed in 40% to 44% of the employment settings, most graduates who were able to demonstrate in-service skills were rated excellent or good by their immediate supervisors. Outreach to agencies and community specialists were observed in most employment settings, and again the predominant ratings were above average.

Table 9. In-Service/Outreach Domains: Percent Employers Rating of Graduate On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
In-service to Parents and Community	32.0	8.0	16.0	4.0	40.0
In-service to Students	26.0	14.0	10.	2.0	44.0
Referral to Outside Agencies	46.0	38.0	12.0	2.0	2.0
Use of Community Specialists	52.0	16.0	14.0	2.0	16.0

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Knowledge of educational procedures and standards represents a final assessment domain for practicing school psychologists. Employer ratings of alumni competence in this area are presented in Table 10. Graduates earned highest ratings in knowledge of legal and ethical issues, with 78% judged excellent. Knowledge of placement procedures, special class eligibility, and completion of forms were also strengths, with 88% to 92% of ratings in excellent and above average categories.

Table 10. Procedures and Standards: Percent Employers Rating of Graduates' On-Job Performance

Performance-Based Knowledge and Skill Objective	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Knowledge of Forms	50.0	38.0	8.0	2.0	2.0
Knowledge of Placement Procedures	58.0	30.0	10.0	---	---
Knowledge of Special Class Procedures	64.0	28.0	2.0	4.0	2.0
Knowledge of Ethical/Legal Issues	78.0	18.0	2.0	2.0	---

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Employer Ratings of Personal Dispositions of Alumni Practitioners

In addition to knowledge base and skill domains, employer surveys contained items related to professional dispositions/personal suitability for service in the profession. Performance-based objectives regarding personal suitability included indices such as objectivity, responsibility, respect for others, vitality, motivation, ethics, time management, tact, discretion, and professionalism. Field ratings of alumni on these qualities are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Percent Employers Rating Graduates Personal Dispositions for the Profession

Performance-Based Personal Disposition	Excel.	Good	Ave.	B.A.	N/O
Able to be Objective	64.0	24.0	10.0	2.0	---
Able to Weigh Evidence	68.0	18.0	14.0	---	---
Accepts Responsibility	76.0	12.0	8.0	2.0	---
Assumes Appropriate Responsibilities	82.0	12.0	4.0	2.0	---
Carries Through on Responsibilities	74.0	16.0	8.0	2.0	---
Respect Opinions and Beliefs of Others	76.0	14.0	8.0	2.0	---
Regard for the Role of Others	74.0	12.0	10.0	4.0	---
Adjusts to Meet Special Needs	72.0	20.0	6.0	2.0	---
Motivation and Vitality	80.0	10.0	8.0	2.0	---
Planning and Use of Time	56.0	28.0	12.0	4.0	---
Tact and Discretion	72.0	14.0	12.0	---	---
Conducts Self as a Professional	78.0	10.0	6.0	2.0	2.0

Totals may not always sum to 100% because some employers left some items blank

Results show that employers observe and evaluate the wide range of behaviors associated with personal suitability for the profession. On all such items, ratings of excellent were the norm for program graduates. Specifically, more than 70% of graduate practitioners were rated as excellent on dispositions such as accepting and carrying through on responsibilities, respect for opinions and beliefs of others, regard for the roles of others, tact and discretion in dealing with others, adjusting to meet special needs, motivation and vitality, and conducting self as a professional. Even on the most challenging items (objectivity, weighing evidence, and planning/use of time) most alumni (84%) received ratings that were at least above average.

Discussion and Future Directions

Results of alumni and employer surveys provided evidence that program graduates possess on-job knowledge, skills, and dispositions defined by the School Psychology Program. Program graduates resemble the national profile of school psychology practitioners regarding gender, years of service in the profession, and salary earned. The program alumni sample was more diverse than the national professional sample with regard to representation of ethnic/racial and deaf/hard of hearing professionals. Most alumni work as school psychologists in mainstream, day, and residential programs that include deaf and hard of hearing students, thereby utilizing their additional special training for this population.

Most alumni expressed confidence in the knowledge and skills acquired as graduates of the School Psychology Program, and cited a variety of strengths in course offerings, faculty, and learning environment experienced at Gallaudet. Weaknesses that were cited in areas FBA, behavior management, and working with other exceptionalities, have already been addressed at the program level through new course development and revisions of existing courses. Since 54.7% of the 84 alumni respondents graduated prior to 1990 (when the program moved from a Masters-plus CAGS to a 72-semester hour Specialist Degree program), a segment of the respondents citing those weaknesses likely exited the program before those curriculum revisions were implemented. More recently, program revisions have focused upon assessment of training experiences and services to students and families from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic populations. Currently, the focus of program revisions centers around increased knowledge and skills related to family systems and home-school collaboration, emerging roles that were among performance objectives in the current surveys.

The vast majority of employers rated program graduates as above average and excellent in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they bring to the profession of school psychology. Consistently high ratings were obtained across all six major knowledge and skill domains (Child Study, Specific Assessment, Behavioral Approaches, Counseling and Consultation, In-service and Outreach, and Procedures and Standards) and on all items related to personal dispositions. Although program graduates are trained to use newer assessment systems (e.g., UNIT, CAS, CBM) and tests developed specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students (e.g., Meadow-Kendall and CID), most employment settings offered no opportunity for observation of these skills. Graduates and current students may need additional training in advocating for expansion of services they can provide, for promoting themselves and their full range of abilities.

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