Psychology Doctoral Program Assessment Review Report: Advising and Mentoring of PhD and Master’s Programs, The Graduate Center, CUNY, Spring, 2020

The Psychology Doctoral Program, the largest doctoral Program at the Graduate Center, is comprised of the following ten Training Areas: Basic and Applied Social Psychology (BASP), Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience (BCN), Clinical Psychology at John Jay (Clinical-Forensic), Clinical Psychology at Queens (Clinical-Neuropsychology), Cognitive and Comparative Psychology (CCP), Critical Social-Personality and Environmental Psychology (CSPEP), Developmental Psychology, Health Psychology and Clinical Science (HPCS), Industrial-Organizational Psychology (I/O) and Psychology and Law. The Clinical Programs at John Jay and Queens as well as HPCS are each accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA), and follow their advising and mentorship requirements. Because of the different specializations, the different training Areas sometimes similar and different approaches to advising and mentoring, and these approaches are therefore described in groups of approaches.

a. Do you have a system of academic advisors concerned with academic progress and professional development in place? Do you have individual advisors for individual students, or one or more faculty (e.g., EO, DEO, DGS) who serve this function for all students? Which do you think is optimal?

The Clinical Psychology at John Jay and Queens as well as HPCS Training Areas employ multiple means of advising and mentoring graduate students, including individual research mentors, peer mentors, ongoing oversight by the program head, and regular faculty meetings to review student progress. As well, students complete coursework in professional development and receive intense clinical mentoring from faculty during their mandatory/required externship year in the Hunter (HPCS), John Jay (Forensic) or Queens (Neuropsychology) College Psychological Clinics. This combination of advising and mentoring provides each student with access to multiple mentors to help support their progress through the program. The following are provided:

Individual research mentors: All students work in a core or associated faculty lab from their entry into the program. The individual research mentor is expected to meet with the student and provide guidance to ensure the student is meeting expectations. Individual mentors are also expected to provide oversight on professional development. Students choose the labs and mentors with whom they work. Students have the option to change labs.

Faculty who mentor all students: The Directors of Clinical Training (DCT) and the Training Area Heads are always available to respond to student questions. All core faculty are also available to answer questions about program requirements and professional development.

Yearly review: The DCT meets with every student at the end of the spring semester each year and reviews the student’s individual progress. This meeting occurs after a review of the student’s progress is collected from the student and research mentor and/or clinical mentors and a full meeting is convened with the core faculty where each student is reviewed. This is described in greater detail in the Training Area Handbook: “Students” progress is monitored closely throughout their enrollment in the program. Once per year, students and their respective faculty research mentor complete an information form that details their progress. Each student
meets individually with the DCT once in the spring semester and, later that semester, the full faculty meets to review the progress of each student in the program and on the basis of completion of program milestones as well as professional development. The clinical committee determines which students are ready to apply for Internship in the upcoming fall semester. Issues of professionalism, retention and termination are discussed at this time. Any problems that arise at this meeting (or at other times during the year) are referred to the mentor, or the DCT, as appropriate. After the annual evaluation meeting, students are given written feedback. This feedback includes suggested efforts to remedy any problems that have been identified. Students are also provided with written feedback regarding any corrective actions taken and the degree to which such actions have proved successful. It is important to note that these yearly evaluation letters form the basis for the DCT’s letter of internship readiness. Professional issues such as but not limited to lateness of assignments, significant delays in research related work or assignments, unresponsiveness to faculty requests, and unprofessional handling of the faculty-student relationship that remain a problem will likely be included in the DCT’s letter of internship readiness. In addition to written feedback from the DCT after the annual evaluation meeting, a notice is sent to student (and DCT) from the Graduate Center registrar if the student is out of compliance with the program (e.g., non-payment of tuition, GPA below 3.0, failure to meet a doctoral program deadline).”

Course work: All students take a course in professional development offered in their second year that offers direct training in areas of importance to professional development. Students are encouraged to work closely with the professor to ensure they have the skills needed for success, including (but not limited to) overview of writing a strong CV, discussion of appropriate professional behavior and interviewing skills.

Clinical mentors: Each student is required to complete an on-site externship in their third year of the program where they are supervised by the Clinic Director and two additional faculty members who work individually with each student to develop their clinical skills in adult and child psychotherapy, neuropsychological assessment, as well as leading a group, and supervision and consultation. The three mentors perform individual student reviews at the end of each semester and the Director discusses the findings with each student to ensure each is meeting expectations.

Peer mentors: Most labs have a hierarchy in place where students who have been involved take on mentoring roles with those entering the lab. This provides a rich support resource for students who get to learn directly from peers. As well, peer supervision is offered throughout student’s clinical training, such that more advanced students work with more elementary students giving them support and mentoring. As well, more advanced students are roles models for less advanced students.

The BASP, BCN, CCP, CSPEP, Developmental, I/O and Psychology and Law Training Areas assign individual faculty advisors for each student, selected based on the best match between their research interests and expertise. The decision of selecting individual advisors for each student is made at the time of admission to the training area by the admissions committee, in consultation with the prospective advisors, based on the assessment of such a match (following interviews with the incoming students and assessment of their application materials including their statement of interests and expertise). Typically, assigned advisors proceed to work as supervisors on students’ research projects including second year research project, second year
examination paper and later, their dissertation. All students have an option to change their advisors/supervisors during the course of their studies in case their research interests evolve to focus on topics where an alternative faculty has a particularly strong expertise. In cases like this, the Training Area head is notified and takes part in all negotiations of switching advisors.

b. **Do you have a system of individual mentors for individual students, who can serve as counselors as well as guides for academic and professional development? Are these faculty members or students, or both?**

Students typically work with their primary advisor, yet also communicate and receive mentorship from additional faculty members (typically two) who are included as mentors on their second year research project and later, on their dissertation in the BASP, BCN, Clinical at John Jay and Queens, CCP, CSPEP, Developmental, HPCS, I/O and Psychology and Law Training Areas. In addition, the Training Area head is always available to discuss any ongoing issues that might come up in the course of students’ studies and research and to provide additional mentorship. We also have a “buddy system” in place so that all incoming students are assigned with an individual student acting as a mentor for their first year in the program (and often beyond). Additional mentors on teaching, typically faculty who are teaching classes on pedagogy/education/teaching and learning (since this is the area of expertise of several Training Area faculty), are available to students. The Annual Psychology Pedagogy Day serves as a focal point for developing teaching expertise for our students (see section j).

c. **How are faculty/students assigned as mentors/advisors?**

The advisors are selected from central line and campus-based faculty in the BASP, BCN, Clinical at John Jay and Queens, CCP, CSPEP, Developmental, HPCS, I/O and Psychology and Law Training Areas. Recent implementation of a dual advisement model has occurred in which individual students work with two advisors. This is based in the growing trend that many topics in a number of training areas are becoming more interdisciplinary such as that a student might be interested in two (or more) areas. In such a case, two faculty member with respective areas of expertise might be selected to work with the student. Additional faculty members, typically two, are selected to collaborate on each student’s second year research project that the student is carrying out in the training areas and, later, on dissertation research. The selection of particular faculty to act in this role is done through the primary advisor’s negotiation with the student and fully takes students’ interests, plans, and expertise into account.

d. **How often do students meet with their mentors/advisors throughout the semester? Does your program have a policy on this? Do you think the current frequency is optimal?**

All mentors/advisor meet regularly with their advisees. The frequency of meetings depends on whether students are working in laboratory or other settings. In laboratory
settings, the students can typically meet with their advisors as frequently as several times each week. In other settings, the meetings take place less frequently, but often bi-weekly, especially as when students develop their research agenda and when they are working on their research papers and dissertations.

e. **Does advising/mentoring continue when students select a supervisor for their dissertation/capstone/thesis project? Or does the supervisor take on the role of mentor/advisor?**

Typically, assigned advisors proceed to work as supervisors on students’ research projects including the second year research project, the second year examination paper, and ultimately, their dissertation. Two additional faculty members also collaborate with students on all three of these requirements. In clinical Training Areas, the DCT has an annual meeting with each student.

f. **What system do you have in place to ensure that advisors/mentors (and students generally) are aware of what is expected of an advisor/mentor, and of academic requirements and regulations?**

All students are advised to consult the Handbooks of the different Training Areas which outlines detailed policies of advisement. Incoming students also are introduced to these policies at the first community meeting (early in each Fall semester) which serves as their orientation. Domains of progress are evaluated systematically including course-based progress, recommended and mandatory time-based deadlines (e.g., doctoral examinations, movement from one level to another, en-route Masters degrees and dissertation topic proposals, dissertations proposals, committee creation and dissertation evaluations). The Training Area Handbooks are updated on a regular basis (practically every year) following discussions among faculty at the faculty meetings. For example, we recently added a section on the policy of not bringing snacks to students’ presentations and dissertation defenses based upon discussion in the media (e.g., in the Inside Higher Ed published by the University of Texas [https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/08/14/phd-students-resent-expectation-they-bring-food-and-drinks-their-thesis-defenses](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/08/14/phd-students-resent-expectation-they-bring-food-and-drinks-their-thesis-defenses)). Currently, we are working on adding materials to the Handbook on the policies of co-authoring student-faculty publications using recent APA guidelines and discussions. Different Training Areas have instituted a Proseminar/Professional Development series each semester for first and second-year students in which individual faculty present to students, and answer all questions, on all topics of academic professional development including advising and mentoring.

g. **What system do you have in place to ensure that advisors/mentors (and students generally) are aware of resources and support services?**
The Training Areas have several faculty meetings each academic year including meetings of the curriculum and executive committees. At each faculty meeting, and especially at the end of the academic year, the needs and progress of all students and mentoring issues are discussed. At the end of the year meetings, we also discuss strategies for improving mentorship, faculty-student relationships, and program activities. Results of the First Doctoral Examination are presented to entire Training Area faculty and students, thereby providing public feedback about the first-year requirement and progress. The second year research paper, which is based on the first doc exam presentation, can then address issues within the student evaluation process. The CSPEP Training Area received an $8000 PublicsLab Doctoral Curriculum Enhancement Grant to hold a series of facilitated events over the course of 2020-2021 that will strengthen faculty-student communication, engage the enrolled student body across cohorts and levels of advancement, leverage the professional expertise of alumni, and help to prepare an action plan for the next seven years. Advising/Mentoring is an area we explicitly intend to take up as part of this grant. Finally, the previously-described Proseminar-Professional Development series also accomplishes this.

h. Do you have systematic procedures in place for student and advisor/mentor reports on student progress?

The Training Areas hold a yearly meeting of the faculty to discuss student progress that include all advisors/supervisors reporting on each student academic progress and any associated issues, faculty discussion and input for the advisors and a follow up with each individual student. A number of Training Areas also have students fill out a “Student Activity Report (SAR)” or an equivalent in which the students fill out the courses they taken recently, their grades, awards they’ve received, the research they’ve completed/publications, teaching they’ve conducted as well as their progress on their First Doc/dissertation. These forms are discussed between the mentor and mentee in order to also receive feedback from the mentee. Each student’s progress is then discussed among the faculty to solve any issues that may have arisen. The Clinical Training Areas hold annual evaluations of externship performance of all Clinical students.

i. Do you have annual (or semester) evaluations of student progress, and how is this administered? By individual mentors/advisors, or a specific tasked committee? How is feedback communicated to students?

See Sections g and h.

j. Do you have separate teaching mentors? Faculty or students? How are these assigned?

Typically, advisors and additional faculty working with students on their second year research projects and dissertations are available to mentor students on all matters related to teaching. We have a strong faculty who are experts on all matters related to teaching, at the intersection of psychology and education – for example, Dr. Particia Brooks who has served for many years as the organizer of Pedagogy Day at the GC CUNY (an event
brining taking place every year where world renowned experts on teaching are invited to present to faculty and students, followed by panels organized by students and faculty, joint discussions, Q&A sessions etc). Moreover, many GC-based classes are dedicated to topics of teaching and learning including together with the Futures Initiative/Center at the GC, see https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Initiatives-and-Committees/The-Futures-Initiative in which students get up to date information and develop expertise in pedagogy and education. We also have strong ties to sister (e.g., Urban Education) doctoral programs and our students have access to the faculty of this Program for consultations and advisement/mentoring.

k. How are your policies on mentoring/advising made available to students and faculty (e.g., are they made available in your student handbook or online)? Are such policies discussed at orientation?

Online handbooks for each Training Area are updated at least on an annual basis.

Future improvements for Advising and Mentoring:

Some Training Areas have initiated some other steps for improving mentorship, with a particular focus on how the program can better support student success (measured with conference presentations, publications, and benchmark satisfaction).

Increase the number of times students give research presentations. A number of Training Areas hold near-weekly colloquia throughout the academic year that traditionally bring in outside speakers to present their research. The number of such meetings set aside for students to present their own research work varies across Training Areas, and can limit opportunities for students to present and discuss their research. Additional colloquia dates are being considered for students to give presentations, specifically recommending that students present the findings of their first doctoral exam, second comprehensive exams, and dissertations (with the latter given as a practice “job talk”). The benefits associated with this change are manifold: students would feel more accountability and motivation to complete benchmark exams and dissertation work in a timely manner; gain additional practice with public speaking, which is an essential professional skill, and wider dissemination of student research. Such programs would enhance and interact with the Psychology Program-wide Annual Research Day which is sponsored by the DEO for Research, and takes place in the last Friday of April or first Friday in May. The previous nine such days has attracted between 35 and 60 student poster presentations along with a planned symposium during the lunchtime hour. The most recent one, held during the COVID crisis was held quite successfully online. Students who have successfully received DRSG grants and/or Psychology Program Travel Awards are regular contributors to this Psychology Research Day.

Enhance and standardize the role of a secondary” mentor. Presently, there is wide variation in whether and how a secondary mentor role is fulfilled across training Areas. Some students are actively engaged in research and meet frequently with both their primary and secondary mentor, but this is not ubiquitous and formal guidelines for how secondary mentorship should be conducted are lacking. Some ideas include that, in conjunction with increasing the suggestion to
increase student presentations, and the possibility that students can switch mentors and research topics throughout their graduate career.

**Continue to improve and coordinate Proseminar and Professional Development courses.** Proposals for more content-specific topics to professional development be included in existing and required doctoral seminars. For example, students would likely benefit from hands-on lessons in how to prepare materials for academic job searches, converting a CV into a resume for non-academic positions, and networking/collaborating with colleagues at conferences. Related to these proposals, the program is also compiling example materials (e.g., research and teaching statements, cover letters) that can be shared with students preparing to enter the job market.