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Satisfaction with Research Training in Christian Psychology Doctoral Programs: Survey Findings and Implications

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Perceptions of research training at seven explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology were assessed with a satisfaction survey. A total of 283 students, 98 alumni, and 51 faculty completed the online questionnaire. Perceived strengths include faculty-student collaboration, encouraging students to present at national meetings, respect for faculty, and effective curricula. Areas for future growth include enhanced research funding, making research mentoring available to all students, and decreasing the perceived dichotomy between clinical and research competence. Self-reported faculty and student publication and presentation rates are also presented and discussed.

A hallmark of clinical psychology as a profession is its scientific moorings. Indeed, one of the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002) is that "psychologists' work is based upon established scientific and professional knowledge of the discipline" (p. 5). Not surprisingly then, psychologists value researching the success of their work.

Evaluating the efficacy of psychotherapy, though expensive and time-consuming, lends itself well to the scientific method. Research volunteers can be randomly assigned to one of various treatment conditions, or to a wait-list control group, and then outcomes can be measured using standardized instruments. Similar methods are not feasible when evaluating the work of professional education in clinical psychology. For obvious ethical and practical reasons, one cannot randomly assign students to particular graduate programs, or to a wait-list control group, and then assess the outcome of their training at some later time. Even if the random assignment were possible, there are no standardized measures to assess quality of training or competence as a psychologist.

Given that professional training does not lend itself to randomized trials, one of the most useful ways to evaluate success in training is to assess satisfaction of key informants. This is analogous to the recent trend toward effectiveness studies in psychotherapy research, where systematized control is sacrificed in order to

gain the real-world insights of those who have gone through the experience (see Howard, Moras, Brill, Martinovich, & Lutz, 1996).

The purpose of the present study is to assess satisfaction regarding research training in explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology. We collected opinions from faculty, current students, and alumni.

Method

Procedures

In April, 2004, program directors at each of the explicitly Christian doctoral training programs in clinical psychology were invited to participate in a survey research project designed to assess the quality of their research training. Programs invited included Azusa Pacific University, Fuller Theological Seminary, George Fox University, Regent University, Rosemead School of Psychology (Biola University), Seattle Pacific University, and Wheaton College. Participation involved providing a list of email addresses for current students, faculty, and a representative group of alumni, with the understanding that we would be contacting the individuals on the lists they provided, requesting that they complete an online questionnaire. Each of the 7 programs elected to participate, though 3 of the programs preferred not to provide email lists. For these three programs, we provided the link to the online survey and suggested wording for an invitation letter, and then they sent out the invitations from their own administrative offices.

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Participants

In all, we received 283 completed questionnaires from current students, 98 from alumni, and 51 from faculty, resulting in a total of 432 respondents. Because we did not have access to the mailing lists from 3 of the 7 schools, we cannot compute an overall response rate. However, we can estimate a response rate based on the 4 schools that provided email lists. From these four schools, we received 171 of 274 possible responses from students (62.4%), 86 of 168 from alumni (51.2%), and 31 of 50 (62%) from faculty.

The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 7.3 minutes, with faculty taking an average of 12.9 minutes, students taking 6.4 minutes, and alumni taking 6.8 minutes. The average age was 47.2 years for faculty (ranging from 31 to 70), 30.6 years for students (ranging from 21 to 62), and 36.9 years for alumni (ranging from 27 to 60). Overall, 40.3% of respondents were female (55.3% of faculty, 33.2% of students, and 53.1% of alumni). The majority of respondents (76.2%) were European-American, with other ethnicities being represented in small proportions (4.6% African-American, 5.3% Asian-American, 6.7% Latino, 1.6% Native American, 3.2% international, and 2.3% other). Most faculty respondents held the Ph.D. degree (78.4%), with an additional 17.6% holding the Psy.D. degree. Approximately two-thirds of the student respondents were enrolled in Psy.D. programs, with the remaining enrolled in Ph.D. programs. Most alumni respondents (86.7%) had been enrolled in Psy.D. programs, with a minority (13.3%) coming from Ph.D. programs.

Instrument

Though the questionnaires were necessarily slightly different for each of the three respondent groups (students, alumni, faculty), they were based on a similar template. First, respondents were asked basic demographic information, including age, sex, ethnicity, highest educational degree, and the program in which they are (or were) involved. Second, they were asked to rate 12 items pertaining to the quality of research training at their institution on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Very Poor") to 5 ("Very Strong"). The third section of the questionnaire posed several questions about the respondent's research productivity. Finally, respondents were asked two open-ended questions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of research training in their program.

Results

The purpose of this survey research is to provide an overall view of satisfaction with and productivity in research training at integrative doctoral programs, and not to offer comparative data among the various programs.¹ As such, we have neither analyzed nor do we report the data in a comparative manner.

Satisfaction Ratings

Table 1 summarizes the ratings on the 12 satisfaction items regarding research training. The items are listed in order of the overall satisfaction ratings, with the highest rated items at the top of the list. We evaluated for differences both within-groups and between-groups.

The within-group analysis looked for overall rating differences among the 12 items. Significant differences were found, Wilks' $\lambda(11, 388) = .289$, $p < .001$, which then justified profile analyses using paired-sample *t*-tests to determine which items were significantly lower than the preceding item on a rank-ordered list, using a conservative α of .01 to control for Type I error. Inter-item differences are identified in Table 1.

The between-group analysis looked for group differences among the satisfaction items. An overall multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed group differences, Wilks' $\lambda(24, 770) = .783$, $p < .001$. Follow-up univariate tests, again using a conservative α of .01, revealed significant group differences on 6 of the 12 satisfaction items. Post-hoc Scheffe tests helped identify which groups differed from one another on the 6 items with overall group differences. Because the Scheffe test is already a conservative test, we used a standard α of .05 to evaluate the findings of the post-hoc tests. All of the within- and between-group differences are reported in Table 1. Variables with group differences suggest that faculty have the most positive appraisal and alumni the least positive.

To get an overall univariate assessment of all 12 satisfaction items, we computed the average rating of the items for each respondent and then compared respondent groups on this overall average. An overall group difference was present, $F(2, 428) = 7.1$, $p < .01$, and post-hoc Scheffe tests revealed that both faculty and students provided more positive ratings than alumni.

Research Productivity

Faculty respondents were asked to report their research productivity in the past 5 years. Respon-

Table 1
Satisfaction Regarding Research Training

	Overall	Faculty	Student	Alumni	Group Diff
Collaborative research between students and faculty	3.7	4.1	3.7	3.4	F>S,A; S>A
Students presenting research at professional meetings*	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.4	
Research productivity among faculty	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.4	
Coursework in research methods	3.5	4.1	3.5	3.3	F>S,A
Collaborative research among faculty	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.3	
Research mentoring for doctoral students	3.4	4.0	3.5	3.1	F>S,A; S>A
Overall research training*	3.3	3.7	3.3	3.0	F,S>A
Research productivity among students*	3.1	3.2	3.1	2.9	
Students publishing dissertation results*	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.8	
Special events to bring in visible researchers	3.0	3.6	3.1	2.3	F>S,A; S>A
Students publishing in refereed journals	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	
Securing funding for research*	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.1	F,S>A
Average rating across 12 satisfaction items	3.2	3.5	3.3	3.0	F,S>A
<i>Notes.</i> All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Very Poor") to 5 ("Very Strong"). Items are arranged in descending order based on overall satisfaction ratings. * indicates items rated significantly lower than the preceding item ($p < .01$). Group Diff refers to group differences that were found for particular items, where F = faculty, S = students, and A = alumni.					

Respondents reported an average of 4.2 published research articles, but a wide degree of variation was observed with a standard deviation of 4.6 and individual responses ranging from 0 to 21 articles. Similarly, large variation was noted when faculty were asked the number of students with whom they have co-authored research articles, ranging from 0 to 36 ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 5.8$). There were relatively more faculty reporting research presentations at national meetings ($M = 9.9$ presentations, $SD = 10.9$, ranging from 0 to 51), with the number of student co-authors being involved in research presentations averaging 6.9 (SD of 8.7, ranging from 0 to 45). Most faculty had not written or edited scholarly or popular books in the past 5 years. In all, 14.3% had edited one or more scholarly books, 12.2% had written one or more scholarly books, and 13.1% had written one or more popular books. The average number of chapters in scholarly books was 1.9 ($SD = 2.0$, ranging from 0 to 8).

Students were asked to report on their research activities during their years of enrollment in their doctoral program. Student respondents had been enrolled in their programs for an

average of 3.0 years ($SD = 1.5$, ranging from 1 to 7 years). Most had not published a research article (90.8%), a chapter in an edited book (98.9%), nor had most given a research presentation at a national meeting (67.2%). However, a sizable minority (32.8%) had presented a research paper at a meeting, with 15% reporting multiple presentations. Students who had presented research at a national meeting provided higher overall satisfaction ratings with their research training than those who had not, $t(272) = 3.3$, $p < .01$.

Alumni were asked about research activities since completing their training. On the average, they had been out of their doctoral program for 3.6 years ($SD = 2.3$, ranging from 1 to 10 years). Most had not published a research article (77.9%), given a research presentation at a national meeting (58.3%), written a scholarly book (95.8%), edited a scholarly book (100.0%), nor written a popular book (94.7%). The average number of research article publications was 0.4 ($SD = 1.0$, ranging from 0 to 5) and research presentations was 1.1 ($SD = 2.2$, ranging from 0 to 17). Alumni who had published a research article since graduation provided higher overall

tion ratings with their research training than those who had not $t(93) = 2.4, p < .05$, but no difference was found between those alumni who had or had not presented research findings at national meetings since graduation.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Finally, respondents were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of research training in their programs. Among faculty, 47 respondents identified a total of 70 strengths, and 44 respondents offered a total of 56 weaknesses. Among students, 227 respondents provided a total of 239 strengths and 220 identified a total of 231 weaknesses. Among alumni, 88 respondents identified a total of 94 strengths and 91 provided a total of 95 weaknesses. Responses were coded, using qualitative data analysis software. The major themes identified by respondents are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Discussion

The overall satisfaction ratings reveal neither unabated enthusiasm nor despair about research training in explicitly Christian doctoral training in clinical psychology. Most ratings were in the mid-range of the 5-point Likert scale, indicating that training is perceived as adequate. When group differences existed, faculty tended to be the most enthusiastic about the research training they provide, alumni were the least positive, and students were somewhere between faculty and alumni. These differences may reflect the level of commitment that each group has to their particular training institution. Faculty typically have long-term loyalties, and to some extent their livelihood depends on investing their talents and energies in the program. Students are committed to a training program for several years, but do not anticipate a long-term future at the institution. Alumni break out of the enclave upon graduation and their identification with their training program may lessen as a result. Depending on one's perspective, degree of commitment may enhance or detract from the accuracy of one's perception. It is possible that the more positive faculty ratings reflect greater awareness of the inner workings of an institution and the complexities of research training, but it is also possible the higher faculty ratings reveal some selective perceptions or self-serving biases. Similarly, the passage of time may cause alumni to have less awareness of the intricacies of research training, but also to be less vulnerable to personal bias. Alumni ratings, in

particular, may also be uniquely influenced by other factors such as comparison with professional colleagues who attended other graduate programs or the burden of a heavy financial debt load that they must now repay.

Both the quantitative ratings and the written comments about program strengths and weaknesses help clarify the areas of greatest satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Several areas of strength can be identified. First, faculty-student collaboration is a distinctive strength, topping the lists on both Table 1 and Table 2. This is experienced in various ways: supportive relationships with faculty, vertically-integrated research teams, research mentoring, and collaborative presentations and publications. It seems likely that faculty and students are drawn to explicitly Christian programs because of factors other than cutting-edge research. If their highest priority were state-of-the-art research involvement, they would have pursued employment or admission at a major research university. Instead, they chose an explicitly Christian doctoral program in order to mentor and be mentored in matters of faith, practice, and science. The success of this sort of holistic mentoring relies on faculty-student relationships, and it appears that there is much to be celebrated in this regard. Second, and also related to faculty-student collaboration, Christian doctoral programs encourage students to attend professional meetings to present their research. These meetings are part of a socialization process that allows students to become acquainted with seasoned scholars while gaining appreciation for the strong empirical commitments of clinical psychology. Third, there is a good deal of respect for faculty in these institutions. Many faculty are seen as productive researchers and role models. Fourth, the curriculum is perceived to be effective.

Growth areas can also be identified. Foremost on the list is the issue of research funding. Faculty, students, and alumni all perceived this to be a problem. Some, though not all, of the Christian doctoral programs do not accept federal research grants because of the distinctively religious nature of their institutions and concerns that federal grants may be accompanied by subtle secularizing pressures. Private foundations are a source of funding, but foundation grant programs tend to be exceptionally competitive and the heavy teaching loads at private Christian institutions sometimes renders it difficult for faculty to establish the sort of research record that makes them appealing for research grants. Difficulty

Table 2
Perceived Strengths of Research Training

Group	Major Themes	%	Example
Faculty	Student-Faculty Relationship	53	"The major strength is the implementation of research vertical teams ... it has enhanced the collaborative efforts between students and faculty."
	Curriculum	16	"A strong and thorough research design and statistics course series."
	Faculty	13	"Faculty engagement in the scholarly process is very active."
	Dissertation	13	"Our program allows for some flexibility in choice of dissertation project, which allows our more creative and non-traditional students to make a dissertation contribution that fits their professional goals quite well."
Students	Faculty	34	"The faculty members are supportive and encourage students to get involved in their projects."
	Student-Faculty Relationship	33	"The collaboration with faculty and students is truly amazing. The faculty at my school are great about helping students to get their name out and encouraging students to publish."
	Curriculum	21	"Coursework is very strong."
	Student Opportunities	16	"Large projects with highly involved faculty; many opportunities to get experience at a variety of levels; an environment of scholarly research."
	Dissertation	9	"We're encouraged to have our dissertations completed before entering into internship and the faculty helps us meet that goal."
Alumni	Student-Faculty Relationship	45	"Availability of faculty to mentor students and include them in research."
	Curriculum	19	"The classroom instruction is well done."
	Training Emphasis	16	"I appreciated the focus on research with practical implications to applied science."
	Faculty	14	"Good research skills among faculty."
	Dissertation	9	"Simply put, I had a tremendous experience learning how to conduct research from the proposal of the project all the way to data collection. My dissertation was one area in which I was challenged to synthesize the data and make contributions."
<i>Note.</i> % = percentage of overall comments that contained this theme.			

Table 3
Perceived Weaknesses of Research Training

Group	Major Themes	%	Example
Faculty	Funding	36	"Difficulty in consistently attaining research funds."
	Time Demands	16	"Our work load as faculty is significantly higher than that of faculty in research universities. This leaves us less time to develop programmatic research labs producing on-going research on the same topic area."
	Training Emphasis	14	"The strength of the clinical program has taken priority in program development. Now that the clinical program is solid, the research training is getting significantly more attention."
	Student-Faculty Relationship	14	"Not enough faculty doing research for students to be involved with."
Students	Faculty	36	"Lack of diverse options for students due to limited faculty and limited research opportunities."
	Curriculum	28	"We have 2 research classes here, neither of which I feel prepares us to engage in future independent research."
	Funding	19	"There is no funding support. Students must either write their own grant or pay for research from their own pocket."
	Training Emphasis	17	"Other than for the dissertation, it seems that research is not emphasized. It is nice to do some and get exposure but the emphasis of the program seems to be clinical skill."
	Opportunities	17	"We are not exposed to sufficient research training opportunities."
Alumni	Training Emphasis	33	"Research seemed to be an afterthought as compared to clinical work."
	Student-Faculty Relationship	32	"The mentoring available to students was uneven. While all students had the opportunity to receive mentoring, the amount of mentoring and quality of mentoring varied."
	Curriculum	23	"Research methods coursework could be enhanced to prepare students in the field of research."
	Funding	13	"Funding, funding, funding."
<p><i>Note.</i> % = percentage of overall comments that contained this theme.</p>			

obtaining external grant funding also means that students are rarely offered research stipends and tuition remission. Given the financial pressures they face, students are then forced to work off-campus which, in turn, lessens their availability for research activities on campus. Another area of concern for students and alumni has to do with uneven availability of research mentoring. Though faculty-student collaboration is a great source of satisfaction for faculty and some current and former students, it appears to be an area of frustration for others. Some students are not sure how to access effective research mentoring, or they feel they have been paired with a faculty member who lacks research expertise or interest. The funding and uneven mentoring problems may contribute to relatively low satisfaction ratings with student publication rates. Finally, some students and alumni report a competition between clinical training and research training, noting that clinical emphases receive priority to the exclusion of research emphases. This dichotomy, which seems both false and unnecessary, is disconcerting given the importance of basing clinical work, when possible, on solid research evidence. Perhaps explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology need to emphasize the integrated relationship of clinical and research skills more than they presently do.

With regard to research productivity, 84% of faculty reported having published a research study in the past 5 years. This is remarkably similar to the data reported by Johnson and McMinn (2003) who found that 83% of faculty in explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology publish in journals. This proportion of publishing faculty compares favorably with faculty in other practitioner-scholar and scientist-practitioner programs (Cherry, Messenger, & Jacoby, 2000). In considering the quantity of faculty research publications, it is interesting to note the disparity between this survey study and data reported elsewhere in this special issue (McMinn, Johnson, and Haskell, 2004). The data in the present study were based on self-report for a 5-year period between 1999 and 2004, revealing an average of 4.2 published research articles. McMinn et al. (2004) evaluated PSYCINFO listings for a 5-year period between 1996 and 2001 and found an average of 2.0 overall articles for faculty in Ph.D. programs and 1.7 for faculty in Psy.D. programs. These differences may reflect reporting bias, selection bias (i.e., research-minded faculty may have been most

inclined to complete the questionnaire), time differences between the two 5-year periods assessed, or the possibility that perhaps some faculty are publishing in journals not included in the PSYCINFO indexing system.

Student research productivity at explicitly Christian doctoral programs appears to be consistent with other clinically-focused training programs while lagging behind scientist-practitioner programs. In the present study, 9% of current students had published a research article. This is consistent with the 7% rate reported by Johnson and McMinn (2003) and similar to rates observed in secular practitioner-scholar programs (7%), but less than students in scientist-practitioner (30%) or clinical scientist programs (39%). Alumni who responded (mostly Psy.D. graduates) do not publish at high rates.

Conclusion

Each of the seven doctoral programs included in this study has provided a narrative of their research training for this special issue of *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. From these narratives, it is clear that many good things are happening. This survey confirms that positive research training is occurring, especially in areas of faculty-student collaboration, presentations at national meetings, respect for faculty, and research curriculum. However, there are still areas of growth that need to be considered as these doctoral programs continue to mature and develop. Research funding is a significant challenge, the mentoring is uneven, and some students and alumni perceive a competitive relationship between science and practice. Although publication rates for students are respectable in relation to other professional school programs, they lag behind scientist-practitioner and clinical scientist programs.

Faculty, students, and alumni are generally satisfied with the research training they receive at explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology. Indeed, there is much to be celebrated. There is also ample room for growth.

Note

1. For this reason we will also not draw comparisons between PhD and PsyD responses since only three institutions offer the PhD. It is noted that on most (but not all) variables, PhD responses did not differ significantly from PsyD responses.

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