

Introduction

As many students feel increased economic pressure to get their degrees as quickly as possible, there is a potential for valuable applied experiences (e.g., internships) that do not carry academic credit to be sacrificed in order to graduate faster. For students interested in applied fields of psychology (e.g., clinical/counseling, school), it may be particularly important for students to be exposed to what the work in the field is actually like before undertaking the commitment of graduate education, as exposure to typical work activities is hard to gain due to confidentiality laws protecting clients' privacy. This may be increasingly true as the prospect of financing master's degrees in the current economy may make students hesitant to pursue further study without having experience in the field. Students also may have unrealistic expectations for career roles based on information gained via media portrayal of psychotherapy. In this pilot study, we investigated the prevalence of opportunities for students to engage in applied experiences, both general to psychology and specific to clinical/counseling/school, as a for-credit component of their major among baccalaureate institutions.

Methods

Participants

- A list of 512 colleges and universities classified as 4-year, non-profit, Baccalaureate institutions by the 2015 Carnegie Classification report was used as the preliminary sample in this study. A total of 64 schools were removed from the list because the institution did not offer a major in psychology ($n = 36$), the institution was a regional campus with the same curriculum as another institution in the sample ($n = 16$), course listings could not be found online ($n = 7$), or the institution had closed ($n = 5$). The final sample consisted of 448 baccalaureate institutions.

Procedure

- The institutions' psychology department websites and the academic catalog were reviewed to determine if the psychology department offered applied experiences in the community.
- Research internships/practica, teaching internship/practica, and independent studies were not counted.
- General applied experiences were defined as internships, practica, or field placements in any domain of psychology which carried a specific course number in the psychology department.
- Applied clinical experiences were defined as practica or field work courses where the title and/or course description specifically identified the course as involving placements in mental health, school, rehabilitation, or peer counseling. If these types of settings were among a list of other options (e.g., research experiences, marketing, teaching assistant roles), the course was counted as a general applied experience.
- Website reviews were conducted by the second through sixth authors, who were undergraduate students trained to look for specific language in course titles and descriptions. When the results were unclear, the site was flagged for further review by the first author.

Analysis

- Descriptive statistics for the institutions were calculated based on data in the Carnegie database and logistic regression analyses were used to determine which factors predicted the presence of applied psychological experiences.

Results

Institutional Profiles

Descriptive statistics about the institutions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Institutions in Sample.*

Variable	n	%	Variable	n	%		
<i>Setting</i>			<i>Geographic Region</i>				
City	135	30.1	Northeast	116	25.9		
Suburb	102	22.8	Southeast	141	31.5		
Town	159	35.5	Midwest	131	29.2		
Rural	52	11.6	West	60	13.4		
<i>Sector</i>			<i>Designation</i>				
Public	71	15.8	HBCU	34	7.6		
Private	377	84.2	HSI	27	6.0		
			MSI	56	12.5		
			Women's College	20	4.4		
	n	%	M	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
<i>Full-Time Enrollment</i>							
< 1000	145	32.4	667.06	242.08	700.0	43	995
1000-3000	266	59.4	1711.09	522.80	1642.5	1006	2978
3000+	37	8.3	4940.97	3559.77	3763.0	3004	22614
Total			1639.93	1553.54	1353.0	43	22614
<i>Selectivity/25th Percentile ACT Scores</i>							
Inclusive	160	35.7	16.29	1.45	17	11	18
Selective	140	31.3	19.41	1.00	19	18	21
More Selective	148	33.0	24.78	2.75	24	21	32
Total			20.44	4.00	20	11	32

Note: HBCU = Historically Black College or University; HSI = Hispanic Serving Institution; MSI = Minority Serving Institution

Table 2. *Logistic Regression Predicting Presence of Applied Clinical Experiences based on Institution Characteristics*

Variable	b	SE	Wald's z	p	OR [95% CI]
Intercept	-0.61	0.79	-0.78	.44	---
Private	-0.16	0.33	-0.49	.62	0.85 [0.44, 1.63]
Northeast	-0.06	0.31	-0.18	.85	0.95 [0.52, 1.72]
Southwest	-0.19	0.31	-0.60	.55	0.83 [0.45, 1.53]
West	0.41	0.36	1.14	.25	1.51 [0.74, 3.09]
Underserved Designation	0.14	0.33	0.42	.67	1.15 [0.60, 2.21]
Enrollment	-0.36	< 0.01	-0.45	.65	1.00 [1.00, 1.00]
Selectivity	-0.20	0.28	-0.07	.94	0.98 [0.56, 1.71]
ACT Scores	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	.90	0.99 [0.89, 1.11]

Note: Underserved designation includes Historically Black Colleges or Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Minority Serving Institutions, and Women's Colleges; Nagelkerke's $R^2 = .01$.

Table 3. *Logistic Regression Predicting Presence of General Applied Experiences based on Institution Characteristics*

Variable	b	SE	Wald's z	p	OR [95% CI]
Intercept	1.05	0.73	1.45	.15	---
Private	0.21	0.31	0.71	.47	1.24 [0.68, 2.26]
Northeast	-0.23	0.27	-0.86	.39	0.79 [0.46, 1.35]
Southwest	0.25	0.28	0.89	.37	1.28 [0.74, 2.19]
West	-0.32	0.35	-0.91	.36	0.73 [0.37, 1.44]
Underserved Designation	-0.78	0.31	-2.48	.01	0.46 [0.25, 0.85]
Enrollment	< 0.01	< 0.01	0.83	.40	1.00 [1.00, 1.00]
Selectivity	0.43	0.26	1.66	.10	1.53 [0.92, 2.53]
ACT Scores	-0.10	0.05	-1.96	.05	0.90 [0.81, 1.00]

Note: Underserved designation includes Historically Black Colleges or Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Minority Serving Institutions, and Women's Colleges; Nagelkerke's $R^2 = .04$.

Results (cont.)

Prevalence of Applied Experiences

Of the 448 schools included in the analysis, 286 (63.8%) offered some sort of for-credit applied experience. There were 119 institutions (26.6%) offering applied clinical applied experiences and 214 (47.8%) offering general applied experiences (47 institutions offered both).

Predictors of Applied Experiences

No institutional factors predicted the presence of applied clinical experiences (see Table 2). The only significant predictors of the presence of general applied experiences was the Carnegie designation of serving one or more historically oppressed or underprivileged groups ($p = .01$) and the 25th percentile ACT score ($p = .05$; see Table 3). On average, institutions designated as serving one or more historically oppressed or underprivileged groups were only about half as likely ($OR = 0.46$) as other institutions to offer for-credit general applied experiences in the psychology department. On average, as the 25th percentile ACT score increased by 1 point, the likelihood of an institution offering for-credit general applied experiences in the psychology department decreased by approximately 10% ($OR = 0.90$).

Discussion

Global Findings

- For-credit applied clinical experiences were only about half as common as general applied experiences in baccalaureate institutions' psychology departments, though nearly 2/3 of psychology departments offered some type of for-credit applied experience.
- No patterns of institutional characteristics emerged in terms of offering applied clinical experiences.
- Schools attracting stronger students (at least in terms of entrance exam scores) seem to be less likely to offer general applied experiences, perhaps banking on intuitional prestige to make applicants more competitive on the job market.
- It is unclear at this time why institutions serving historically oppressed groups would be less likely to offer for-credit general applied experiences.

Research Recommendations

- More detailed analysis of these courses (e.g., examination of syllabi) would likely illuminate additional components of similarity and uniqueness among these courses.
- Exploration of the opportunities for students in non-baccalaureate institutions would complement the current findings.
- Interviews with department chairs may elucidate rationales for departmental offerings.

Limitations

- Though our study attempted to create both a liberal and conservative estimate of for-credit experiential opportunities for applied psychology fields, our results still likely underestimate the prevalence due to the requirement that the credit be housed in the psychology department and have a specific course number (e.g., independent studies and topics courses were not captured).
- Non-credit-bearing opportunities are clearly beneficial as well, though our current design does not capture the opportunity for students to engage in these activities.

