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ABSTRACT

The Psychologist-in-Training (PIT) Program provides an opportunity for participants to conduct graduate study and obtain work experience leading toward New York State certification in school psychology. The PIT program offers tuition reimbursement at the prevailing City University rate to people pursuing study within the New York City Board of Education. To be eligible, participants must be continuously enrolled in an academic program, and agree to take a minimum of 12 credits per school year. Evaluators from the Office of Educational Research (OER) distributed a total of 77 questionnaires to participants in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the (PIT) Program. A total of 32 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a 42 percent response rate. Findings indicate that participants' assessment of the program was quite positive. However, participants' comments about various aspects of the program indicate that there is some room for improvement. Suggestions were made to have training which focuses more on practical skills, an easier application process, and better dissemination of relevant material. Based on these findings, OER recommends more hands-on training, as well as clearer and more timely dissemination of information regarding placement and fulfillment of the service obligation. (Author)

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OER Report

1991-1992 PSYCHOLOGIST-IN-TRAINING
PROGRAM EVALUATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Psychologist-in-Training (PIT) Program provides an opportunity for participants to conduct graduate study and obtain work experience leading toward New York State certification in school psychology. The PIT program offers tuition reimbursement at the prevailing City University rate to people pursuing study towards New York State Certification in exchange for employment within the New York City Board of Education. To be eligible, participants must be continuously enrolled in an academic program, and agree to take a minimum of twelve credits per school year.

Evaluators from the Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) distributed a total of 77 questionnaires to participants in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the (PIT) Program. A total of 32 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a 42 percent response rate.

Findings indicate that participants' assessment of the program was quite positive. However, participants' comments about various aspects of the program indicate that there is some room for improvement. Suggestions were made to have training which focuses more on practical skills, an easier application process, and better dissemination of relevant material.

Based on these findings, O.E.R. recommends more hands-on training, as well as clearer and more timely dissemination of information regarding placement and fulfillment of the service obligation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the Research Unit of the Office of Educational Research (O.E.R./R.U.) under the supervision of Ms. Mabel Payne. Dr. Ira Brandenburg developed the research design, and Dr. Sangeetha Purushothaman developed the questionnaire and supervised its distribution and collection. Dr. Lynne Manzo and Ms. Leah Weich analyzed data and wrote the report, while Ms. Carol Meyer served as senior editor.

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INTRODUCTION

Program Background

The Psychologist-in-Training (PIT) program provides individuals with an opportunity to conduct graduate study and obtain work experience leading toward New York State certification in school psychology. This program is divided into two components: (1) tuition reimbursement, which subsidizes tuition costs associated with graduate coursework in school psychology, and (2) an internship which provides one year of supervised and paid work experience in a school setting.

The tuition reimbursement component of the PIT program provides for a maximum of 36 credits of coursework for New York City public school employees, and a maximum of 18 credits of coursework for non-public school system employees. Tuition is reimbursed to participating institutions at the prevailing City University rate*. In exchange for tuition assistance, participants must sign a contract indicating that they will complete one year of service as a school psychologist for every 12 credits of tuition reimbursement (or part thereof) received. In addition, all tuition reimbursement candidates must apply for the PIT internship.

The internship component of the PIT program is designed to provide participants with a range of professional development activities to facilitate the application of emerging clinical skills. Interns are supervised by school psychologist field

*See Appendix A for a list of participating colleges and universities.

trainers, and are considered employees of the New York City public school system.

The internship component of the PIT program operates somewhat independently from the tuition reimbursement component of the program; that is, a person who has already completed the necessary coursework outside of the PIT program can still join the program to do an internship. Those who join the program at the internship level are not required to fulfill the service obligation which tuition reimbursement recipients must fulfill.

Evaluation Methodology

During the 1992-93 school year, evaluators from the Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) met with representatives from the Office of Recruitment, Placement, Assessment and Licensing (ORPAL) to develop an evaluation plan for ORPAL's PIT Program. As a result of this meeting, O.E.R. evaluators developed a participant questionnaire in the spring of 1993. In this instrument, participants were asked about their views of recruitment, academic training, the tuition payment system, the internship, and the service obligation requirement of the PIT Program. These issues were grouped into the following topic areas: (1) participants' progress through the program; (2) program assessment; and (3) employment experiences and opportunities.

In the summer of 1993, the participant questionnaire was distributed to a total of 77 program participants: 41 graduates, 18 active participants, and 18 persons who were considered in

default of their program obligations.' Thirty-two questionnaires were returned completed, resulting in a response rate of 42 percent.

Of those who responded to the questionnaire, 56 percent (21 of 32) were PIT program graduates, 25 percent (8 of 32) were "active" participants (i.e., they had not yet completed the program), and nine percent (3 of 32) were in default.

The Scope of the Report

The next section presents evaluators' findings regarding program implementation, including participant characteristics, a description of participants' progress through the program, and participants' assessment of various aspects of the Psychologists-in-Training Program. This is followed by O.E.R.'s conclusions and recommendations, presented on page 15.

'Participants were considered in default if they had not completed their internship, or had not fulfilled their service obligation. The latter usually occurs when a participant withdraws from school after receiving payment for coursework completed.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Participant Characteristics

Table 1 (below) illustrates the demographic characteristics of respondents.

TABLE 1

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

| ITEM | RESPONDENTS | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| | N | % |
| <u>Gender</u> | | |
| Female | 22 | 69 |
| Male | 8 | 25 |
| <u>Age</u> | | |
| 20-30 | 7 | 19 |
| 31-40 | 9 | 28 |
| 41-50 | 13 | 38 |
| 50+ | 3 | 9 |
| <u>Race/Ethnicity^a</u> | | |
| White | 20 | 62 |
| Latino | 5 | 16 |
| African-American | 4 | 13 |
| Asian | 2 | 6 |
| No Response | 2 | 6 |
| <u>Languages Spoken</u> | | |
| English | 32 | 100 |
| Spanish | 6 | 19 |
| Hebrew/Yiddish | 4 | 13 |
| Chinese | 2 | 6 |
| <u>Educational Background</u> | | |
| Bachelors | 1 | 3 |
| Bachelors + ^b | 4 | 13 |
| Masters | 9 | 28 |
| Masters + | 16 | 50 |
| No Response | 2 | 6 |

^a Since race/ethnicity and languages spoken are not mutually exclusive categories, responses exceed 100 percent.

^b "Bachelors +" indicates graduate school credits or advanced certification beyond a Bachelor's degree, while "Masters +" refers to more than one Master's degree or advanced certification in addition to a Masters degree.

- The majority of participants were white, monolingual women in their forties, with at least one Master's degree.

As Table 2 indicates, participants attended several different colleges and universities in the New York City metropolitan area.

TABLE 2
WHERE PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED COLLEGE

| COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES | RESPONDENTS | |
|------------------------|-------------|-----|
| | N | % |
| Brooklyn College/CUNY | 9 | 28 |
| City College/CUNY | 7 | 22 |
| Long Island University | 6 | 19 |
| Queens College/CUNY | 5 | 16 |
| Fordham University | 3 | 9 |
| St. John's University | 2 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 32 | 100 |

- The majority of participants (66 percent) attended one of the CUNY colleges.

At the time of this evaluation, most participants had completed their coursework toward certification. All 21 program graduates had completed the necessary coursework, while the majority of active participants (75 percent) and defaulters (67 percent) also reported completing coursework. All but one participant who had completed their coursework had accumulated at least 60 credits.*

Participants' Progress through the PIT Program

Most participants (69 percent) entered the PIT program in the fall of 1991. However, other participants (22 percent) joined the program in the fall of 1992. Six of the seven

*One participant who was in default reported completing coursework with 48 credits.

participants in this latter group were of active status, and had not yet completed the program. The remaining nine percent joined the program in 1986 or 1989.

Participants learned about the PIT program through a variety of sources described in Table 3.

TABLE 3
HOW PARTICIPANTS LEARNED ABOUT PROGRAM

| SOURCE | RESPONDENTS | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----|
| | N | % |
| PIT Program Coordinator* | 5 | 16 |
| Office of Recruitment | 12 | 38 |
| College/University | 19 | 59 |
| BOE Brochures or Circulars | 7 | 22 |
| Teacher/BOE Employee | 6 | 19 |
| Non-BOE Friend | 2 | 6 |
| Non-BOE Advertisements | 1 | 3 |

* Since these categories are not mutually exclusive, responses exceed 100 percent.

- Most participants learned about the program through the PIT program coordinator or through college staff or advisors.

Many participants (47 percent) were actively recruited by either the PIT program coordinator or the Office of Recruitment. The majority of participants (66 percent) felt that recruiters were helpful, while only six percent felt they were not. Twenty-eight percent did not respond to this question, since they were not recruited by anyone. Instead, these participants learned about the program through brochures, advertisements, or people whom they did not consider recruiters.

Of those who explained why they joined the PIT program, many (41 percent) indicated that the PIT internship was an important incentive. Tuition reimbursement also had some influence on why participants joined the program (15 percent). In fact, respondents gave this component a mean rating of 3.2 on a scale of one to five, where 1=poor and 5=excellent. Others cited the pay rate and benefits (15 percent) or the opportunity of gaining additional skills (15 percent) as the reason why they joined the program. The remaining 14 percent mentioned that the program helped ease the transition from their previous position to their new position as a school psychologist.

Ninety percent of PIT respondents had enrolled in an internship. Based on their descriptions of the process, attaining an internship involved the following steps: (1) submitting an application to the PIT coordinator, (2) being interviewed by a panel of psychologists, and (3) if accepted, being assigned a position.

All respondents reported having a service obligation, indicating that these participants did their course work through the PIT program and received tuition reimbursement. The length of the service obligation was distributed as follows: 1 year (22 percent), 2 years (38 percent), and 3 years (38 percent).^{*} Table 4 (see next page) depicts the amount of the service obligation PIT participants had fulfilled at the time of this evaluation.

^{*} Two percent did not specify the length of the service obligation.

TABLE 4

AMOUNT OF SERVICE OBLIGATION THE PARTICIPANTS COMPLETED

| Amount of Service Obligation Completed | Respondents | |
|--|-------------|----|
| | N | % |
| Not Yet Begun | 4 | 13 |
| 1 of 3 years (1/3) | 9 | 28 |
| 1 of 2 years (1/2) | 7 | 22 |
| 2 of 3 years (2/3) | 1 | 3 |
| Completed (1/1, 1/2) | 11 | 34 |

- Most participants had completed one year of their service obligation.

Sixty-nine percent of participants (all graduates and one defaulter) reported completing the PIT program, while the remaining 31 percent had not. All graduates of the program (n=21) completed the program in the spring of 1992. Most (75 percent) of those who had not yet completed the program anticipated graduating in the spring of 1993. The remaining 25 percent expected to graduate in the fall of 1993 and the spring of 1994, respectively.

Participants' Assessment of the Program

Table 5 (see next page) depicts participants' views of the various components of the Psychologist-In-Training program. Respondents rated the internship and the overall administration of the program fairly highly, although the application process was viewed somewhat less favorably. The mean rating of the internship was 4.1 on a scale of one to five, where 1=poor and 5=excellent. The mean rating for the overall administration was 3.8, and the application process received a mean rating of 3.4.

TABLE 5
PARTICIPANTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST-IN-TRAINING PROGRAM

| Item | No Experience N % | Poor < | | | 4 | | | Excellent | | Mean Rating | No Reply N % |
|--|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|-----------|----|----------------|--------------------|
| | | 1 N % | 2 N % | 3 N % | 4 N % | 5 N % | | | | | |
| Application Process | 0 0 | 4 13 | 2 6 | 6 19 | 12 38 | 5 16 | 3.4 | 3 | 9 | | |
| Internship | 1 3 | 0 0 | 2 6 | 4 13 | 9 28 | 11 34 | 4.1 | 5 | 16 | | |
| Overall Administration of the Program | 0 0 | 3 9 | 1 3 | 6 19 | 7 22 | 12 38 | 3.8 | 3 | 9 | | |

• More than half of the respondents gave the program a rating of "4" or "5" (on a scale of one to five) on all aspects.

TABLE 6
PARTICIPANTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE FACULTY

| ITEM | No Experience N % | Poor < | | | 4 | | Excellent | | Mean Rating | No Reply N % |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|---|----------------|--------------------|
| | | 1 N % | 2 N % | 3 N % | 4 N % | 5 N % | | | | |
| Scheduling of Classes | 0 0 | 0 0 | 1 3 | 3 9 | 17 53 | 7 22 | 4.1 | 4 | 13 | |
| Coursework | 0 0 | 0 0 | 1 3 | 4 13 | 15 47 | 7 22 | 4.0 | 5 | 16 | |
| Academic training | 0 0 | 0 0 | 1 3 | 4 13 | 13 41 | 12 38 | 4.2 | 2 | 6 | |

• PIT program participants rated faculty highly, with mean ratings of "4" and above on all aspects.

Although 62 percent of participants gave the internship a rating of "4" or "5," some (38 percent) had suggestions for improving this aspect of the program. Many of those suggestions (42 percent) focused on upgrading the quality of mentors' skills and their relationship with interns. Other suggestions (25 percent) called for more varied work experience, indicating participants' desire to work at different job sites under the supervision of different mentors. Another 25 percent stated that interns should face more stringent requirements and be more carefully placed in internship positions. Finally, some participants (8 percent) requested follow-up training to supplement the internship experience.

Table 6 depicts participants' views of the PIT program faculty. Participants rated the faculty most highly on their ability to provide academic training. Seventy-nine percent gave them a rating of "4" or "5" on this aspect. However, 50 percent of the respondents felt that their training needed improvement. Of those who offered suggestions for improving training, 69 percent pointed out that there should be more focus on practical skills such as counseling and assessment. This was supported by the fact that many participants (32 percent) also asked for more emphasis on counseling skills when suggesting improvements to coursework. Other participants (19 percent) also suggested more visits to schools for hands-on experience and more interaction with working psychologists as a way to improve their academic training.

Some participants (31 percent) offered suggestions for improving the overall administration of the PIT program. Of this group, some felt a better application process was needed, while others described a need for more varied and practical training sessions with more discussion and hands-on work rather than lectures. Other participants felt interns needed more notice about where and when they were going to be placed, and still others -- particularly defaulters -- felt they needed more information about fulfilling the service obligation.

Graduates and defaulters described problems they experienced during their involvement in the PIT program. Many of these difficulties arose during their internship. Some participants pointed out that they had either no workspace or poor workspace conditions. Others described difficult interpersonal relations with school staggaoemembers of their supervisory team. They also described the difficulties experienced in being hired by the schools, including inconsistent hiring procedures and lack of information about placement. As one graduate explained, "Interns are not told where they are going until one hour before they are placed. We should at least have been given a day's notice." Another participant described having to seek out materials and make telephone calls because no notices or timetables were available.

Despite their critique of the PIT program, participants praised the Psychologist-in-Training program as an important and useful one. As one woman commented:

The PIT program was a real incentive to continue working in the field. Besides offering a paid internship and security of job placement, it really prepared me for my job this year. In retrospect, it was the best thing I ever did.

Another participant stated, "This program gave me the opportunity to continue working while preparing me for another related field."

Participants' Employment Experiences

All but one program participant were working for the New York City public schools at the time of this evaluation. Table 6 depicts the locations of PIT program participants current positions.

TABLE 7
PIT PARTICIPANTS' WORK LOCATIONS

| District | School |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | PS 19, PS 20 |
| 5 | PS 92, PS 200 |
| 6 | IS 218 |
| 10 | PS 257, JHS 143 |
| 13 | PS 305 |
| 16 | JHS 57 |
| 19 | PS 13, IS 292 |
| 21 | PS 128, 199 |
| 22 | PS 52, IS 14, IS 78, IS 278 |
| 23 | PS 140, JHS 263, JHS 275 |
| 24 | IS 721 |
| 25 | 185 |
| 28 | IS 182 |
| 31 | PS 11, PS 25, PS 38 |
| 78 | Bklyn and Bx HSs |

- Participants were placed as interns or school psychologists in districts throughout the five boroughs. However, many (42 percent) of the districts were located in Brooklyn.

At the time of this evaluation, all graduates of the program (n=21) were working as school psychologists. Four specified that they were bilingual school psychologists. Most graduates had

held their position from eight months to one year, although one graduate was in his current position for the second year. While many graduates expected to be re-hired the following year (57 percent), a fair number did not (33 percent). These participants cited the lack of seniority and the possibility of being transferred as reasons why they did not expect to be re-hired.

Fifty percent of the active program participants (4 of 8) were currently working as "Psychologists-In-Training" as part of their internship. Half of these participants were uncertain that they would be re-hired in their current school the following year, explaining that there were no permanent positions available in those schools. Two other active participants were working as social workers in the public schools, since they had not yet begun their internship or completed their coursework.*

None of the three participants who were in default were working as a school psychologist or doing an internship. Instead, they were working as a special education teacher, or a substance abuse prevention and intervention specialist. Two of these participants expected to be re-hired in their current position. However, one person classified as a defaulter expected to begin the PIT internship the following year.

*The remaining two active participants did not provide their current employment status.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The fact that all of the graduates of the PIT program were working as school psychologists suggests that the program provided participants with a significant career opportunity. This benefit is further supported by the fact that fifty percent of the active program graduates were working as "Psychologists-In-Training" as part of their internship.

However, the long-term advantages of participation in PIT are ambiguous. For instance, while many graduates expected to be hired next year, a fair number did not. Further, half of the active participants were uncertain that they would be re-hired in their current school the following year, explaining that there were no permanent positions available in those schools. Therefore, it is evident that there are certain constraints to employment which cannot be compensated by enrollment in the PIT program.

Findings also indicated participants' views of the different components of the Psychologist-In-Training program. Respondents rated the internship, overall administration of the program, and faculty highly. However, the application process was viewed somewhat less favorably. These findings suggest that the bureaucratic process and the information dissemination aspects of the program were the areas most in need of improvement.

Recommendations

Based on participant feedback, it is recommended that academic training for the Psychologist-in-Training program focus more on practical applications and hands-on training.

Further, more careful consideration should be given to placement procedures. Participants' feedback indicated that different program participants are prioritized for job placement according to whether they are Board of Education employees or whether they participated in the tuition reimbursement component of the program. Hence, efforts should be made to standardize hiring procedures and opportunities to all participants for school psychologist positions. One possibility is to require all participants to do their coursework through the PIT program, and not allow some to join the program for the internship component only. In this way, all participants also have a service obligation and can be placed within the public school system. Finally, it is recommended that participants be given more information regarding the service obligation component of the PIT program.

APPENDIX A

Colleges and Universities Participating in the
Psychologists-in-Training Program

The City University of New York
Brooklyn College
City College
Queens College
The College of New Rochelle
Columbia University
Teacher's College
Fordham University
Long Island University
New York University
Pace University
Saint John's University
Yeshiva University