

## A Preliminary Evaluation of Efforts to Diversify Psychology

Brea M. Banks and Verence D'Santiago-Eastman

*Illinois State University*

Underrepresentation of individuals from diverse backgrounds in the field of psychology is a well-documented concern, as identified gaps directly impact individuals served (Rogers & Molina, 2006; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). This pilot examination evaluated a task force that sought to address this deficit through targeting the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students into graduate programs in psychology. Participants were 127 undergraduate students at a Midwestern university. Participants completed online surveys that assessed their knowledge of the organization's existence and taskforce events (e.g., open houses). Results indicate that the taskforce reached the appropriate undergraduate population, as participants of junior and senior status were more aware of organization resources. Future research should look to examine if the taskforce's efforts have impacted recruitment and retention outcomes.

In psychology, there has been a longstanding concern regarding the underrepresentation of practitioners from diverse backgrounds (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Maton, Kohout, Wicherski, Leary, and Vinokurov (2006) found that there were no significant increases to the number of African-American and Latino students achieving the Ph.D. from 1989 through 2003. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) reported that only 20.1% of Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees in psychology were received by ethnic minorities, whereas 28% of the general population in 2010 reported racial/ethnic minority status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Concerns surrounding underrepresentation are specifically relevant for professional fields of psychology, such as school psychology. Data from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP; Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2010) membership survey for the years 2009 through 2010 revealed school-based professionals in the U.S. are disproportionately White. Specifically, 90.7% of NASP members identified as White/Caucasian. Only 3.4% of members reported identification as Hispanic/Latino, and 3% reported being Black/African-American. These data are alarming, given that recent U.S. Census data (2012) has indicated that 49.7% of those under five years of age are minority children.

These data are important because research has demonstrated that the gap between the diversity of school psychologists and the students they serve has implications that are not simply theoretical. Specifically, research has revealed that students from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds are overrepresented in special education (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). For example, African-American children are 2.86 times more likely to receive special education services for intellectual disability and 2.28 times more likely to receive services for Emotional Disturbance (ED) when compared to same-age students of all other racial/ethnic groups combined (Losen &

Gillespie, 2012; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). The demographic mismatch between service-delivery personnel and the populations they serve clearly affects client outcomes. Because school psychologists are integral members of multidisciplinary teams involved in the assessment and determination of eligibility and service provisions for these students, knowledge and exposure to multicultural issues is crucial. Proctor (2009) asserts that school psychologists from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds should be well-represented in the field, as students of diverse backgrounds are significantly influenced by school psychology.

The APA has also taken a strong stance regarding the need to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, the organization's accreditation standards state that approved graduate programs must "[make] systematic, coherent, and long-term efforts to attract and retain students and faculty from differing ethnic, racial, and personal backgrounds into the program" while simultaneously "[ensuring] a supportive and encouraging learning environment appropriate for the training of diverse individuals" (APA, 2013, p. 10).

Although recruitment at the national level may prove challenging for universities, there are organizations that strive to provide opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds. One such program has a long history of success. Specifically, the McNair Scholars Program (<http://mcnairscholars.com/>) hosts conferences and organizes opportunities for its members to interact with individuals from colleges and universities. This program is federally funded at more than 200 institutions across the nation and strives to prepare undergraduate students for doctoral-level education by mentorship, research training, and career development. Accepted McNair Scholars are first-generation students or from a group that is traditionally underrepresented in higher education. The research literature demonstrates that positive outcomes (e.g., perceived helpfulness with academic attainment, positive impact on doctoral training experience, increased

perceived competence and confidence, and academic connectedness and identity) have been associated with participation in the McNair Scholars Program (Gittens, 2014; McCoy, Wilkinson, Jackson, 2008).

Also, there are universities across the nation that have sought to address these disparities through their own recruitment efforts. Specifically, Hammond and Yung (1993) reported that the following recruitment approaches were used at a high rate by the sampled 35 professional psychology institutions: use of personal contacts, visibility of minority faculty and staff in recruitment activities, preadmission workshops and open houses, recruitment materials developed for minority students, and media presentations in undergraduate or high school classes. In a more recent review, Rogers and Molina (2006) listed the following as exemplary recruitment techniques used to attract students of color: financial aid, engagement of current minority faculty and students, faculty members making personal contacts, creating links with historical institutions of color, targeting undergraduates at their home institution, offering a visitation program, developing recruitment materials geared for students of color, and contacting other professionals in the field.

Recognizing the problems associated with racial/ethnic underrepresentation, students enrolled within a school psychology program at a Midwestern university took action. Specifically, students were initially recruited to conduct a needs assessment for their doctoral program as part APA reaccreditation. The initial goal of the student committee was to serve as a taskforce to generate ideas for the recruitment and retention of students from diverse backgrounds within the school psychology program at their institution. However, they realized they were more interested in developing a self-sustaining student body that would actively pursue initiatives in the recruitment and retention of students from diverse backgrounds into psychology graduate programs.

The taskforce took on several efforts to achieve the goals of recruitment and retention. Students directed recruitment efforts to pursue individuals locally and nationally. Local efforts involved recruitment at their home university. Specifically, members actively reached out to psychology majors and minors who were involved in registered student organizations with an emphasis on diversity. Taskforce members also initiated statewide efforts by contacting the psychology departments of all major public universities in their state. With the studies conducted by Hammond and Yung (1993) and Rogers and Molina (2006) in mind, members of the taskforce utilized their personal contacts to initiate conversations with psychology faculty off campus and out of state. To engage in national efforts, taskforce members contacted three university-based McNair programs, as members of the

taskforce were previously McNair scholars at their respective undergraduate institutions.

These local, state, and national recruitment efforts consisted of several strategies that were similar to those previously mentioned (Hammond & Yung, 1993; Rogers & Molina, 2006). For example, open houses were hosted that offered information regarding suggested undergraduate courses, the graduate school admissions process, the taking of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and other relevant topics. To address financial need, assistance was offered to those students from out-of-town universities attending the open house, and all students received a complimentary lunch. Further, task force organizers intentionally invited faculty members of color to present at the open houses.

Apart from the open houses, members traveled to several in-state institutions to provide brief presentations concerning graduate school and the admissions process. Members also hosted Skype presentations with undergraduate students who were interested in graduate school but attended out-of-state universities. Finally, members of the organization participated in a regional psychology conference typically attended by many undergraduate psychology students. During this conference and the mentioned presentations, materials were disseminated that included helpful information for undergraduate students, with a specific focus on attracting students from diverse backgrounds.

The purpose of this pilot examination was to gather information from undergraduate students regarding their perceptions of the described organization, such that changes could be implemented to improve the taskforce's efforts. Specifically, researchers were interested in obtaining information surrounding undergraduate students' awareness of the taskforce and resources made available by the organization. The organization had only been in existence for less than two years at the time of data collection, so the current study served as a means to gather information to improve the efforts of the organization. As such, no hypotheses were posed, as this was an exploratory study to assess the visibility of the organization. Further, outcome data surrounding the success of the organization's recruitment (i.e., change in percentage of enrolled students from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds) were not gathered.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Researchers recruited undergraduate students ( $N = 127$ ) who were enrolled at a Midwestern university through the psychology department's research subject pool. Specifically, these students were enrolled in a

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics for Participant Year in School (N = 127)*

	<i>N</i>	Percentage of Participants
Freshman	24	18.90
Sophomore	30	23.60
Junior	44	34.60
Senior	29	22.80

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Race Students (N = 121)*

	<i>N</i>	Percentage of Participants
White	89	70.10
Black	19	15.00
Hispanic	6	4.70
Middle Eastern	7	5.50
Bi-racial	0	0.00

*Note.* 6 undergraduate student participants did not report their race.

psychology course at the time of data collection, for which they would earn extra credit. Researchers obtained approval from their university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. All participants completed online surveys via the online database, Select Survey, which ensures the use of the most advanced technology to secure confidentiality of data. Participants provided informed consent by selecting an option on the survey before completing any items.

Most of the students who participated were of sophomore or junior status and self-identified as White. Six of the undergraduate participants elected not to report their race. Data were not collected regarding participant age, gender, or major. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for descriptions of the sample.

### Measures

Researchers developed a survey that employed a "yes/no" multiple-choice response format, with "yes" coded as 1 and "no" coded as 0. Participants completed items concerning their knowledge of the organization's existence, awareness of sponsored events, and regarding their perception of the availability of resources for undergraduate students. Investigators also included items to assess demographics in the survey. Participants were able to indicate their race or ethnicity in open-ended response option and their year in school using multiple choice format. See Table 3 for all included survey items.

Before analyses were conducted, data collected from participants of freshmen and sophomore status were combined, whereas data collected from advanced undergraduate students (i.e., juniors and seniors) were combined. Researchers also developed a variable to assess minority status, as investigators coded those who identified themselves as White or Caucasian as "non-minority," and those who indicated a race or ethnicity other than White or Caucasian, including those of bi-racial status, as "minority."

### Results

Investigators conducted correlational analyses to examine the relations between predictor and outcome variables, with year in school and racial minority status examined as predictor variables. Significance was only identified as part of the correlational analyses on the outcome variables (see Table 4). Specifically, variables that assessed student awareness of organization resources were all significantly correlated. Researchers therefore created a composite variable (i.e., "Awareness of Resources") to facilitate interpretation. This assessed participants' overall awareness surrounding the availability of resources offered by the organization. It consisted of the addition of 4 items that assessed if participants had previously heard of the organization and if they were aware of the sponsored open house, the availability of graduate student mentors and the organization's website. Given the "yes/no" response format, scores on the "Awareness of Resources" composite ranged from 0 to 4.

Table 3  
*Student Survey Items and Response Format*

---

- I am currently a: (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).
- Please identify your race and/or ethnicity.
- Before today, had you heard of the organization?
- Were you aware of the open house that was sponsored by the organization?
- Were you aware that members of the organization are available to provide information and suggestions concerning applying to graduate school?
- Were you aware of the organization's webpage located on the Psychology Department's website?

---

Table 4  
*Bivariate Correlations between Outcome Variables*

---

	1	2	3	4
(1) Heard of the organization? ( <i>N</i> = 127)	--			
(2) Aware of the Open House? ( <i>N</i> = 127)	.27**			
(3) Aware of available mentorship? ( <i>N</i> = 126)	.39**	.53**		
(4) Aware of the organization's webpage? ( <i>N</i> = 126)	.39**	.33**	.30**	--

---

\*\*  $p < .01$

Table 5  
*Factor Loadings and Communalities based on a Principle Components Analysis*

---

	Component 1	Communality
Heard of the organization?	.69	.48
Aware of the Open House?	.75	.56
Aware of available mentorship?	.79	.62
Aware of the organization's webpage?	.68	.46

---

Researchers conducted a principal components analysis to determine the composition of the component variables. At .68, the reported Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was slightly above the accepted value of .60 (Beavers et al., 2013). Further, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant,  $\chi^2(6) = 90.22, p < .01$ . A one component solution was obtained by examining Eigen values, loadings, and scree plot. Reported Eigen values indicated that the only extracted component explained 52.75% of the variance. All items had primary loadings at or above .60. The component loading matrix for this solution is presented in Table 5.

Missing data were present for dependent and independent variables. Data were missing completely at random, and relevant variables had no more than 1 participant missing. As such, researchers did not employ any techniques to address missing data and did not exclude any data from the analyses.

As part of this pilot examination, researchers sought to examine if students were aware of the task

force and the resources made available by the organization. Researchers addressed this question by gathering undergraduate students' knowledge surrounding the existence of the organization. Of the 127 undergraduate students surveyed, 21% indicated that they had previously heard of the organization. Regarding the sponsored open house for undergraduate students interested in graduate school, 7.9% responded that they were aware. Finally, 8.7% of respondents indicated that they were aware that graduate student members of the organization were available to serve as mentors and were aware of the organization's website.

Investigators conducted Analyses of Variances (ANOVAs) to determine if there existed variables that accounted for undergraduate participants' awareness of resources. When examining the developed "Awareness of Resources" composite (i.e., heard of the organization, aware of the open house, awareness surrounding the availability of graduate mentors, awareness website), a significant main effect for year in

school was identified. Specifically, those participants of junior or senior status ( $M = .67$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) provided ratings indicating that they were significantly more aware of the available resources when compared to those of freshman or sophomore status ( $M = .20$ ,  $SD = .56$ ),  $F(1, 124) = 8.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . Minority status was also examined as a predictor variable for awareness. A significant main effect was not identified for the Awareness of Resources composite,  $F(1, 118) = 2.01$ ,  $p = .16$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ .

### Discussion

The underrepresentation of practitioners from diverse backgrounds in the field of psychology has been identified as a major concern in the research literature (Curtis et al., 2004; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Closing the gap in racial/ethnic disparities among practitioners and the individuals they serve is of great importance. Graduate students at a Midwestern university sought to address the lack of diversity in their school psychology program by developing a taskforce dedicated to the recruitment of undergraduate students. The current study sought to evaluate this taskforce by gathering data from undergraduate students surrounding their experiences with the taskforce.

Results indicated that awareness varied among participants. Although 21% of participants indicated that they had heard of the organization, those of junior and senior status reported being significantly more aware of the available resources when compared to those of freshman and sophomore status. This finding was particularly promising, given the organization's goals to recruit students into graduate programs in psychology. Many of the sponsored activities (e.g., open house) were more relevant for students of junior and senior status, and these students were therefore directly targeted during recruitment phases. Although the taskforce sought to specifically recruit students of minority status, data indicate that minority status was not a predictor of undergraduate student awareness of resources. As such, these results can be directly used to inform future efforts to recruit those of minority status.

### Limitations

Several limitations to the current study exist and should be addressed as part of future research. As mentioned previously, the current study did not include any outcome data relevant to changes in the number of graduate students from diverse backgrounds who were effectively recruited. Given the organization had only been in existence two years at the time of data collection, this information was not yet available. Although participant survey data were helpful in determining the visibility of the organization and

satisfaction with organization efforts, these data do not directly provide information regarding whether or not the organization met its primary goal (i.e., increases in minority enrollment).

It should also be noted that minority status was defined as those who self-reported a race or ethnicity other than White or Caucasian, including those of bi-racial status. However, minority status encompasses all those who belong to groups that are underrepresented (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Data were not collected on these other demographic variables. As such, the current study failed to evaluate how these other factors may have played a role in participants' views of the organization. Also, there exist other variables that may have contributed to participants' ratings of the organization. For example, participants who are more likely to be involved in Registered Student Organizations, and general university sponsored, activities may have been more aware of this organization's efforts because they were looking for them.

Lastly, generalizability to other universities presents another problem. Data from the current study were only gathered from undergraduate student participants at one sampled university. The sampled students elected to participate to receive extra credit in a psychology course, and therefore they may have been different from those undergraduate students who elected not to participate or from those who were not directly recruited (e.g., undergraduate students in psychology courses not offering extra credit).

### Implications for Practice

Studies similar to those conducted by Hammond and Yung (1993) and Rogers and Molina (2006) are necessary, as research is needed to inform graduate programs of the strategies that work to recruit and retain students of diverse backgrounds. However, the literature is lacking in terms of studies and program evaluations that examine the direct outcomes associated with the recruitment and retention efforts of psychology graduate programs. As a pilot, the current study was conducted to add to the research literature, but more importantly to ensure that the targeted students were aware of the resources available at their university.

Given that the research literature is lacking in this area, the current study may be used to guide future research, in that the efforts described in the current study will encourage faculty and students within psychology graduate programs to reconsider the efforts that they currently have in place to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds. The commitment to these efforts cannot be prominent at a select number of programs across the nation. Given standards set forth by APA and NASP, all psychology graduate programs are encouraged to make such efforts an integral part of their

training programs. Further, when efforts are undertaken, graduate programs should not only aim to evaluate the programs that are being implemented, but should also consider what their efforts can add to the research literature.

### References

- American Psychological Association. (2013). *Book 1: Guidelines and principles for accreditation of programs in professional psychology*. Washington, DC: Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/about/policies/guiding-principles.pdf>
- American Psychological Association Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs. (2008). *A portrait of success and challenge—Progress report: 1997-2005*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/success-challenge.pdf>
- Beavers, A. S., Lounsbury, J. W., Richards, J. K., Huck, S. W., Skolits, G. J., & Esquivel, S. L. (2013). Practical considerations for using exploratory factor analysis in educational research. *Practical assessment, research & evaluation, 18*, 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=18&n=6>
- Curtis, M. J., Castillo, J. M., & Gelly, C. (2010). School psychology 2010: Demographics, employment, and the context for professional practices – Part 1. *Communique, 40*(7), 28-30. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ981519>
- Curtis, M. J., Grier, J. E. C., & Hunley, S. A. (2004). The changing face of school psychology: Trends in data and projections for the future. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 49-66. doi: 10.1521/scpq.18.4.409.26999
- Gittens, C. B. (2014). The McNair Program as a socializing influence on doctoral degree attainment. *Peabody Journal of Education, 89*, 368-379. doi: 10.1080/0161956X.2014.913450
- Hammond, W. R., & Yung, B. (1993). Minority student recruitment and retention practices among schools of professional psychology: A national survey and analysis. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 24*, 3-12. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.24.1.3
- Losen, D., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3g36n0c3#page-2>
- Maton, K. I., Kohout, J. L., Wicherski, M., Leary, G. E., & Vinokurov, A. (2006). Minority students of color and the psychology graduate pipeline: disquieting and encouraging trends, 1989-2003. *American Psychologist, 61*, 117-131. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.61.2.117
- McCoy, A., Wilkinson, A., & Jackson, R. (2008). *Educational and employment outcomes of Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program alumni*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504177.pdf>
- Proctor, S. L. (2009). *African-American school psychology program leavers* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Georgia State University, Atlanta. Retrieved from [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cps\\_diss/45](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cps_diss/45)
- Rogers, M. R., & Molina, L. E. (2006). Exemplary efforts in psychology to recruit and retain graduate students of color. *American Psychologist, 61*, 143-156. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.61.2.143
- The United States Commission on Civil Rights (2009). *Minorities in special education: A briefing before The United States Commission on Civil Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/MinoritiesinSpecialEducation.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *2010 census shows America's diversity*. Retrieved from [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb11-cn125.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn125.html)
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). *Most children younger than age 1 are minorities, Census Bureau Reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html>
- Zhang, D., & Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Minority representation in special education a persistent challenge. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*, 180-187. doi: 10.1177/07419325020230030601

---

BREA BANKS, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Illinois State University. Her research interests include the cognitive consequences of microaggression, student of color experiences in higher education, and autism spectrum disorder. She has also published work surrounding neonatal follow-up patterns, literacy in refugee children, and behavioral treatment acceptability. Her teaching interests include cognitive assessment, multicultural counseling, and diversity in psychology.

VERENICE D'SANTIAGO-EASTMAN, PhD is a Licensed Specialist in school psychology in a low-income and linguistically diverse school district in Austin, TX. Her research interests include the role of family communication and acculturation in scholastic achievement. In practice, her interests include parent advocacy and teen empowerment through interactions with nature and play among at-risk youth.