

Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS)

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The Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS) was established by the Academy of Psychological Clinical Science (the Academy) in 2007 to promote public health by accrediting clinical science Ph.D. programs in university departments of psychology in the United States and Canada. Clinical science programs aim to produce graduates who generate new knowledge bearing on mental and behavioral health problems, and who engage in the application of such scientific knowledge. Thus, programs accredited by PCSAS place a premium not only on the provision of outstanding research and science-based application training, but also on the integration of research and application activities. Such integrative scientific training is well suited to meeting the needs of a rapidly changing health-care system that increasingly emphasizes the provision of cost-effective mental health services in real-world contexts (Baker, McFall, & Shoham, 2008).

History

On January 14, 2006, the president of the Academy, Varda Shoham, convened a meeting in Tucson of the leadership of the Academy, including the elected executive committee (EC) and the three former presidents of the Academy, to discuss the implications of current and future trends in accreditation for the quality of doctoral training in scientific clinical psychology (i.e., training in psychological

clinical science). The meeting's primary focus was on developing a positive vision for the future of doctoral training in psychological clinical science and identifying the best way to realize this vision.

Those attending were Varda Shoham (president, University of Arizona), Richard McFall (past-president, Indiana University), Richard Bootzin (past-president, University of Arizona), Don Fowles (past-president, University of Iowa), Teresa Treat (secretary, Yale University), Timothy Strauman (treasurer, Duke University), Marc Akins (member-at-large, University of Illinois School of Medicine), Tom Oltmanns (member-at-large, Washington University in St. Louis), Robert Simons (member-at-large, University of Delaware), Timothy Baker (University of Wisconsin; who along with Richard McFall and Varda Shoham was writing a manuscript about integrative psychological clinical training that would be published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* in 2008), Robert Levenson (founding Board member of the Academy, past-president of the Association for Psychological Science, University of California, Berkeley), and Alan Kraut (executive director of the Association for Psychological Science). After extensive discussion by the entire group during the meeting, the Academy EC voted to develop an independent accreditation system.

Supporting documents were prepared; the possibility of an accreditation system was discussed by program representatives at the Academy business meeting in May; and a formal vote of the membership, concluded on October 15, 2006, overwhelmingly endorsed developing an independent accreditation system. Over the next year, the mission statement and guidelines for the structure of PCSAS were prepared. As articulated on the PCSAS website (<http://www.pcsas.org/mission-function.php>), the overarching mission of PCSAS is to advance public health by accrediting doctoral training

programs that provide science-centered research and application training in clinical psychology. Such training is expected to promote public health by increasing the number of integrative and transdisciplinary clinical scientists who develop and apply new knowledge and methods bearing on the etiology, nature, assessment, prevention, and treatment of clinical problems.

Despite the Academy being the parent organization, PCSAS was established as an independent accrediting system. Membership in the Academy is not a requirement for PCSAS accreditation. The Academy EC appoints PCSAS's nine-person Board of Directors, and has provided financial support; however, the PCSAS Board appoints the Review Committee (RC) and delegates all responsibility for accreditation decisions to the RC. The Board is responsible for insuring that the review procedures are implemented as specified in the bylaws and review guidelines, but cannot overturn RC decisions in individual cases.

The Academy is an affiliate of the Association for Psychological Science (APS). The Board of APS and its executive director, Alan Kraut, have been supportive allies of PCSAS from its inception as they have been for the Academy. APS has helped with many logistic details, such as the initial PCSAS web page, arrangements for meetings of the Board, fund-raising, and most importantly, active support of the PCSAS mission. In 2008, Walter Mischel, then president of APS, wrote the foreword for the monograph by Baker, McFall, and Shoham (2008) that provided the rationale for strengthening the scientific base of clinical psychology through the establishment of a new accreditation system, PCSAS. Despite the strong continuing relationship, APS has no ownership stake in PCSAS.

PCSAS Board of Directors

The bylaws of PCSAS call for the Academy EC to appoint the nine-person Board of Directors to consist of five psychological clinical scientists, one nonclinical psychological scientist,

one current or former psychology department chair, one public member, and one student member. By the end of November 2007, the Board was appointed and on December 26, 2007, PCSAS was incorporated. The first telephone conference call of the Board was on February 6, 2008, and the first in-person meeting was held on May 21, 2008.

At the May 2008 meeting, Richard McFall was designated as executive director; he was appointed officially on July 21, 2008. The founding members of the PCSAS leadership included Richard McFall (Indiana University), executive director, and nine Board members: Richard Bootzin (University of Arizona), president of the Board, clinical scientist; Timothy Baker (University of Wisconsin), psychological clinical scientist; Robert Levenson (University of California, Berkeley), secretary, psychological clinical scientist; Beth Meyerowitz (University of Southern California), psychological clinical scientist; Robert Simons (University of Delaware), psychological clinical scientist; Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University), nonclinical psychological scientist; Joseph Steinmetz (Dean, Arts and Sciences, University of Kansas), current or former department chair member; Myles Brand (Executive Director, NCAA), public member; and Rebecca Levin Sifton (University of Illinois), student member. See www.PCSAS.org for a listing of current Board members.

Advisory Council

The Board of Directors has the support, advice, and counsel of distinguished psychological scientists on a variety of critical issues. The Board formalized this advisory role by creating an Advisory Council. The following have agreed to serve on the Advisory Council: David Barlow (Boston University), Aaron T. Beck (University of Pennsylvania), Edna Foa (University of Pennsylvania), Peter Lang (University of Florida), Walter Mischel (Columbia University), Paul Nelson (Frederick, MD), Peter Salovey (Yale University), and Lee Sechrest (University of Arizona).

Founders' Circle

Financial challenges during the start-up years can be daunting for a new, independent accreditation system. On the recommendation of the founding public member of the Board of Directors, the Board created the Founders' Circle, whose members are universities that commit financial support to PCSAS of U.S.\$15,000 a year for 5 years. The Founders' Circle has 17 members as of the fall of 2013, many of whom made a commitment of support during the recession of the past 4 years. The Founders' Circle members are: Duke University, Harvard University, Indiana University, Northwestern University, Purdue University, Stony Brook University, The Ohio State University, University of Arizona, University of California Los Angeles, University of Delaware, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign, University of Kentucky, University of Missouri, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, University of Wisconsin, and Washington University in St. Louis.

PCSAS Review Committee

Applications for PCSAS are reviewed and evaluated by the RC, a standing committee defined in the PCSAS bylaws. Its nine members serve staggered, 3-year renewable terms. RC members are chosen on the basis of their scientific qualifications, areas of expertise, and educational, professional, and administrative credentials. Board members are eligible to serve on the RC. The goal in selecting individual RC members is to create a composite committee that is representative of the cutting edge in psychological clinical science, with the collective breadth and expertise to evaluate the quality of applicants' doctoral educational and training programs.

The RC evaluation of a program applicant focuses on conceptual foundations, design and resources, the quality of the science, quality-improvement efforts, and outcomes. Strong outcomes—that is, a well-established track record of producing clinical scientists who continue after graduation to produce

and engage in the widespread dissemination of scientific clinical psychology—are critical to a positive evaluation. Moreover, given the applied focus of clinical science, successful programs must demonstrate that they provide both excellent research training and superior application training to every program graduate. In particular, every graduate of PCSAS-accredited programs must be prepared to function as an independent clinical psychologist who is ready to assume clinical responsibility for the assessment and treatment of patients with problems in his or her areas of expertise.

PCSAS started accepting applications for accreditation June 1, 2009. The founding RC members were: Robert Simons, RC chair and a Board member (University of Delaware), Timothy Baker, a Board member (University of Wisconsin), Dianne Chambless (University of Pennsylvania), Gayla Margolin (University of Southern California), Richard McNally (Harvard University), Gregory A. Miller (University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign), Susan Mineka (University of Wisconsin), Thomas Oltmanns (Washington University in St. Louis), and Varda Shoham (University of Arizona). See www.PCSAS.org for a listing of current RC members.

Through the end of 2013, 21 programs have been reviewed and accredited. They are: University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign, University of Arizona, Washington University in St. Louis, McGill University, Stony Brook University, University of Kentucky, University of Southern California, Northwestern University, University of Missouri, University of South Florida, Arizona State University, University of Delaware, University of Iowa, Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, University of California Los Angeles, University of California Berkeley, University of Minnesota, University of Oregon, University of Pittsburgh, and University of Virginia. See www.PCSAS.org for more information about the accreditation application process.

Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

Accreditation systems must themselves be recognized if other agencies are going to accept their evaluations. PCSAS obtained formal recognition from the Board of Directors of CHEA on September 25, 2012. When discussing the science-centered training approach embraced by PCSAS, Thomas R. Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), referred to CHEA's recognition as "an important step toward allowing this brand of clinical psychology to thrive, and to ultimately benefit the public" (Jaffe, 2013, p. 9).

CHEA recognition prompted the Department of Veterans Affairs to start the process of recognizing PCSAS accreditation within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for training and employment of psychological clinical scientists. The proposal to modify regulations within the VHA received a boost in May 2013 in instructions attached to the U.S. House of Representatives appropriations bill that stated, "The Committee understands that the VHA is in the process of modifying its regulations to permit the training and employment of psychologists at the VHA who are graduates of PCSAS-accredited programs, and urges the VHA to promulgate the regulatory changes as soon as possible in order to increase the number of mental health clinicians available to veterans using the VA healthcare system" (U.S. House of Representatives, 2014).

Future Directions

Another big challenge for PCSAS is to extend the recognition that is in process at the VHA to other federal and state agencies, including licensing boards in all 50 states and in the Canadian provinces. More generally, those involved with PCSAS are committed to improving the quality of mental and behavioral health services in the United States and Canada by infusing science into all aspects of research,

education, and practice activities. Fortunately, graduates of PCSAS programs are particularly well positioned to make unique and critical contributions to the advancement of public health by enhancing our understanding of psychopathology and by developing, evaluating, implementing, and disseminating effective psychosocial interventions in the changing health-care environment (Baker, McFall, & Shoham, 2008).

SEE ALSO: Academy of Psychological Clinical Science (APCS); Accreditation of Clinical Psychology Training; Association for Psychological Science (APS); Clinical Science Model; McFall, Richard M. (b. 1939); Training Models in Clinical Psychology

References

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- Further Reading**
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