

**APA Accredited School Psychology Programs:
Preparation of Disability Allies Through Graduate Training**

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Abstract

Disability allies are defined as individuals who recognize and challenge ableism at an individual and a systems level. Ultimately, they are supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities by using their power and privilege to amplify the voices and perspectives of people with disabilities. Based on the criteria for APA accredited programs, APA's Ethical Principles and Codes of Conduct, and disability ally behaviors, the following research question was addressed: are APA accredited school psychology programs in New England and New York providing graduate students with courses about being a disability ally, as demonstrated through required course titles and descriptions using the word 'disability' accompanied by at least one of the following words or phrases, (1) self-education, (2) professional development, (3) advocacy, (4) systems-level change, or (5) ally? Only eleven active doctoral APA accredited school psychology programs in New England and New York were included in the search. As a result, there were no courses that especially mentioned any of the associated search terms with the word 'disability' across all programs. The results of this research study suggest that APA accredited programs in the Northeast are not providing their students with the context to support individuals with disabilities through disability allies.

Keywords: Disability ally, school psychology, APA accreditation

APA Accredited School Psychology Programs: Preparation of Disability Allies Through Graduate Training

Allies can be an asset in influencing social norms and injustices within a society by advocating and completing services that lead to change. Without engaging in active roles, allies are not effective and ultimately be considered insufficient. Allies can support a range of causes and are usually considered to be associated with the LGBTQ+ community. However, allies can be dedicated to advocating for any sociopolitical demographic group in society (Melton, 2018). A demographic group that is continuing to face inequalities throughout systems across our society is individuals with disabilities.

Disability allies are defined as individuals who recognize and challenge ableism at an individual and a systems level. Ultimately, they are supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities by using their power and privilege to amplify the voices and perspectives of people with disabilities (Abes & Zahneis, 2020). Disability allies advocate for individuals with disabilities by raising awareness of injustices that they may face throughout their daily lives. Three categories of behaviors engaged in by disability allies include (1) self-education, (2) awareness and advocacy, and (3) direct action (Evans et al., 2005). These three identified areas of behaviors are important for supporting and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities.

The first area, self-education refers to reflecting on your own biases and privilege, while continuing to educate yourself about the problems that individuals with disabilities may face. Self-education is the first step that needs to be completed to be an effective disability ally. Without knowing one's privilege, it becomes difficult to reflect on the differences in experience that they may have compared to someone with a disability.

This step also involved continuing education and knowledge around social justice issues that individuals with disabilities may face and the best practices to support them (Evans et al., 2005). Essentially, without recognizing your negative assumptions about how disabilities may impact an individual's life, you can not successfully be a disability ally.

The second area, awareness and advocacy focus on questioning practices that are commonly engaged in. Some examples include working to ensure that disability is included in diversity discussions, questioning practices that oppress people with disabilities, and having discussions with individuals who have disabilities to hear their perspectives on issues they may face (Evans et al., 2005). Individuals can examine the world they interact with to determine how people with disabilities are affected in that situation. To raise awareness and advocacy, one needs to have critical thinking skills, leadership skills, and consciousness-raising skills to bring awareness of the injustices that individuals with disabilities face (Melton, 2018). An ally that does not engage in advocacy is purposeless.

Lastly, direct action takes the information that you learned through self-education and advocacy to support individual and systems-level change. Some examples of this include, supporting the development of advocacy skills in individuals with disabilities, increasing awareness about being an ally to individuals without disabilities, and challenging and intervening on discriminatory actions or behaviors (Evans et al., 2005). Therefore, direct action allows for meaningful change to support individuals with disabilities.

In a school setting, school psychologists provide academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support to students with and without disabilities. Support services through a school psychologist can be provided directly and indirectly. Direct support includes providing counseling services and progress monitoring evidence-based interventions, whereas indirect support can be through prevention and systematic changes. As a result, a school psychologist is providing students with the tools and supports needed to be successful in and out of the classroom.

APA Accredited School Psychology Training Programs

American Psychological Association (APA) approves school psychology doctoral programs for following their approved criteria, similar to the clinical psychology programs that they also oversee. To receive accreditation through APA, the program has to follow its three professional values and five guiding principles. The professional values, (1) quality, (2) transparency, and (3) peer review are standards that each program needs to meet. Quality ensures that students are receiving the knowledge and skills for competent practice. The second value, transparency refers to the program's standards, policies, and procedures being clear. Lastly, programs need to be peer-reviewed, which means they are reviewed by nominated peers for credibility (APA, 2015).

In addition to the three values, there are also five guiding principles for programs to be accredited by APA. The principles include (1) responsibility to knowledge about cultural and individual differences and diversity, (2) preparation for entry-level practice, (3) advanced level preparation for practice a specialty or area of focus, (4) evidence-based practices, and (5) the program has specific targets and competencies for

students to reach (APA, 2017). APA completes an accreditation process to ensure that programs are continuing to meet their standards and support the development of their students.

Practicing psychologists, including school psychologists, need to follow the ethical principles and code of conduct outlined by APA. The ethical guidelines encompass a variety of areas to guide the professional conduct of school psychologists. Some examples of areas addressed in the ethical principles include clinical practice, research, supervision of trainees, teaching, assessment procedures, and policy development (APA, 2017). Ethical principles that align with the three areas of disability ally behaviors outlined above include 1.02: Conflicts Between Ethics and Law, Regulations, or Other Governing Legal Authority, 2.03: Maintain Competence, and 3.01: Unfair Discrimination. Specifically, 1.02: Conflicts Between Ethics and Law, Regulations, or Other Governing Legal Authority relates to the idea of raising awareness and advocacy because this ethical standard ensures that the individual is ethically resolving conflict with other systems to support the rights of their client. 2.03: Maintain Competence relates to the responsibility of a disability ally to engage in self-reflection and education to ensure they know their biases and current issues people with disabilities are facing. Lastly, 3.01: Unfair Discrimination reflects the behaviors within direct action to ensure all individuals they support are fairly treated and standing up for what is just.

Based on the criteria for APA accredited programs, APA's Ethical Principles and Codes of Conduct, and disability ally behaviors, the following research question was addressed: are APA accredited school psychology programs in New England and New

York providing graduate students with courses about being a disability ally, as demonstrated through required course titles and descriptions using the word 'disability' accompanied by at least one of the following words or phrases, (1) self-education, (2) professional development, (3) advocacy, (4) systems-level change, or (5) ally?

Method

This study utilized a qualitative data collection procedure to determine if APA accredited school psychology programs are supporting the creation of disability allies in their future practitioners through their required training procedures. The researcher first identified regions in the United States where APA accredited programs will be analyzed. Next, the required course titles and their descriptions were found and further analyzed. The specific search procedures for each step are outlined in the following sections.

Search Procedures

Programs

As stated earlier, the target population of this study was APA accredited school psychology programs in the Northeast. The search originally only included New England, but it was soon determined that there are only four active APA accredited school psychology programs in that region. The researcher decided to include accredited programs from NY as the second region of interest. As a result, the APA accredited school psychology programs analyzed in this search include New England and New York.

To find APA accredited programs, the researcher utilized APA's accreditation program search feature on their website. The search feature can be customized to retrieve doctoral programs, internships, and postdoctoral residencies across the U.S.

and Canada. Searches can be narrowed down based on state, type of program (ex. School psychology, clinical psychology, etc.), and type of degree (ex. Ph.D. and/or PsyD). The search was filtered to only include school psychology doctoral programs with either a Ph.D. or PsyD as the search criteria. Only active doctoral APA accredited school psychology programs in New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine) and New York were included in the search. As a result, there were a total of 11 programs across these regions. Specifically, seven programs located in New York, three programs located in Massachusetts, and one program located in Connecticut were analyzed. Additional information about the eleven programs is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Program Demographics

University	State	Degree Program	Total Credit Hours
Alfred University	NY	Psy.D.	122
Columbia University – Teachers College	NY	Ph.D.	90
Fordham University	NY	Ph.D.	103.5
Hofstra University	NY	Psy.D.	100
Northeastern University	MA	Ph.D.	97
St. John’s University	NY	Psy.D.	105
Syracuse University	NY	Ph.D.	90
University at Albany	NY	Psy.D.	91
University of Connecticut	CT	Ph.D.	110
University of Massachusetts Amherst	MA	Ph.D.	117
University of Massachusetts Boston	MA	Ph.D.	96

Courses Titles and Descriptions

After all APA accredited programs were identified, the researcher then explored each program's website to gather information on all eleven programs' course sequences. Each program had different ways of outlining their program's required courses. Examples included an outline of the course sequence on the program's website or in their handbook located on the program's website. The descriptions for the courses were either included with the course sequence or on the school's graduate school course catalog. All required course titles and descriptions were identified and coded.

The coding procedures utilized the key search terms outlined in the research question. First, the word 'disability' was searched for in all course titles and descriptions. If 'disability' was used, the five identified words, (1) self-education, (2) professional development, (3) advocacy, (4) systems-level change, and (5) ally were then searched for in the course titles and descriptions. Courses that had the word disability were recorded into an excel spreadsheet separated by the school. This process was repeated for each required course across all eleven identified programs.

Results

Required courses across eleven APA accredited school psychology programs were analyzed to determine the level of preparation to support future practitioners in becoming a disability ally. Overall, there were no courses that especially mentioned any of the associated search terms, (1) self-education, (2) professional development, (3) advocacy, (4) systems-level change, and (5) ally with the word 'disability' across all eleven programs. The majority of the sample (roughly 82%) had at least one course that

mentioned the word disability in the title or course description. However, courses utilized disability to describe a population of students that they will be discussing in the course. Five of the eleven schools (Fordham University, Hofstra University, Northeastern University, St. John's University, and University of Connecticut) incorporated disability into their course title or description to specify assessment of individuals with educational diagnoses like learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Three of the programs (Northeastern University, Syracuse University, and University of Massachusetts - Boston) focused on disabilities through a cultural or developmental lens. Two programs (Alfred University and Northeastern University) described supporting students with disabilities in their practicum placement course. Lastly, one program, Columbia University – Teacher's College discussed disabilities through education and disability law. The University of Massachusetts – Amherst and University at Albany did not utilize the word 'disability across all required course titles and descriptions.

Table 2

Results

University	Total Courses that Mention Disability	Total Credit Hours	Percentage of Credit Hours
Alfred University	1	122	2.5
Columbia University – Teachers College	1	90	3.3
Fordham University	1	103.5	2.9
Hofstra University	1	100	3.0
Northeastern University	3	97	9.3
St. John's University	1	105	2.9
Syracuse University	1	90	3.3
University at Albany	0	91	0
University of Connecticut	1	110	2.7

University of Massachusetts Amherst	0	117	0
University of Massachusetts Boston	1	96	3.1

Of all programs in this sample, Northeastern University had the largest number of courses that had the word disability in the title or description with a total of three courses. Proportionally, Northeastern had about 9% of credit hours dedicated to discussing students with disabilities. Comparably, programs that had at least one course that mentioned individuals with disabilities made up roughly 2-3%. Percentages of credit hours for each program in the sample are reported above in Table 2.

Discussion

The results of this research study suggest that APA accredited programs in the Northeast are not providing their students with the context to support individuals with disabilities through disability allies. Overall, required courses in the sample utilized the word 'disability' to describe a population of students. 'Disability' did not accompany any of the pre-decided search terms. APA accredited programs are providing students with the knowledge to support individuals with disabilities in the school setting by identifying their individualized learning needs for academic growth. However, the self-education, advocacy, and action aspects associated with being a disability ally are not areas of focus when preparing their graduate students to enter the field.

Of the eleven programs analyzed in the sample, Northeastern's program provided students with the largest percentage of knowledge about individuals with disabilities. Three of their courses provided information about disabilities, which equated to about 9% of their credit hours. The courses had different areas of focus including, assessment and diagnosing disabilities, the cultural context of disabilities, and experience through practicum placements. Unfortunately, none of these courses provide

students with knowledge about becoming a disability ally to support their students based upon the titles and descriptions.

Limitations

Some limitations of this research study should be noted. In particular, the study's sample size and access to information should be addressed. The research study only utilized information from 11 APA accredited programs in the United States, all of which were in the Northeast region. There could be differences in program emphasis and focus across the country. Additionally, the study only focused on APA accredited programs. There are training programs in the Northeast region that were not included because they only provide training to students pursuing a Master's/Advanced Certificate in School Psychology. Programs providing this level of training to students are accredited through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

A second limitation of my study is related to the information I gathered from each program. I only had access to each program's course title and description. Therefore, the courses in the program could have discussed supporting students with disabilities, but it was not directly stated in its title or description. Further, some of my search terms could have been discussed in the course, but it was not included in the title or description. More information could have been received through each course's syllabus, where every topic that is discussed is outlined.

Future Directions

Based on the limitations, some future directions for research can include, increasing the sample and utilizing more information to analyze. Since this study was conducted only on APA accredited programs in the Northeast, it would be interesting to

compared results in other regions across the country. Additionally, it would also be valuable to compare differences across types of programs. This could include comparing NASP accredited programs to APA accredited programs or comparing the results of PsyD to Ph.D. programs. Lastly, it could also be of interest to compare different disciplines to determine which training program providing the most support for their future practitioners to engage in disability ally behaviors.

Another future direction includes utilizing more qualitative information to analyze. Specifically, researchers can either utilize program syllabi to determine if specific topics related to becoming a disability ally are incorporated within required courses. Additionally, it would be worth interviewing current or recently graduated students to assess their level of disability ally behaviors through practices in their current placements of jobs.

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