



**Preparing Professional Psychologists to Serve a Diverse Public:  
A Core Requirement in Doctoral Education and Training**

**Statement of Purpose**

For psychologists to competently serve all members of the public now and in the future, professional psychology training programs strive to ensure that psychology trainees demonstrate acceptable levels of knowledge, skills, and awareness to work effectively with diverse individuals. Clients/patients are complex individuals who belong to diverse cultures and groups. Trainees also bring a complex set of personal characteristics and diverse cultural or group memberships to the education and training process. An important component of psychology training to explore is when and how trainees' world views, beliefs, or religious values interact with and even impede the provision of competent professional services to members of the public. It is essential that potential conflicts be acknowledged and addressed during training so that psychologists are prepared to beneficially and non-injuriously interact with all clients/patients. This statement is intended to help training programs address conflicts between trainees' worldviews, beliefs, or religious values and professional psychology's commitment to offering culturally responsive psychological services to all members of the public, especially to those from traditionally marginalized groups.

**Commitment to a Supportive Training Environment**

Training environments foster the ability of trainees to provide competent care to the general public, and trainees' competencies in professional practice are evaluated regularly. Some trainees possess worldviews, values, or religious beliefs that conflict with serving specific subgroups within the public. For example, they may experience strong negative reactions toward clients/patients who are of a particular sexual orientation, religious tradition, age, or disability status. Trainers take a developmental approach to trainee skill and competency acquisition, and support individual trainees in the process of developing competencies to work with diverse populations. Trainers respect the right of trainees to maintain their personal belief systems while acquiring such professional competencies. Trainers also model the process of personal introspection; the exploration of personal beliefs, attitudes, and values; and the development of cognitive flexibility required to serve a wide diversity of clients/patients. Training to work with diverse clients/patients is integral to the curriculum, and consists of both didactic coursework and practical training.

Training programs, trainers, and trainees cannot be selective about the core competencies needed for the practice of psychology because these competencies are determined by the profession for the benefit of the public. Further, training programs are accountable for ensuring that trainees exhibit the ability to work effectively with

clients/patients whose group membership, demographic characteristics, or worldviews create conflict with their own. Trainers respectfully work with trainees to beneficially navigate value- or belief- related tensions. At times, training programs may wish to consider client/patient re-assignment so trainees have time to work to develop their competence to work with client/patients who challenge trainees' sincerely held beliefs. Trainers utilize professional judgment in determining when client/patient re-assignment may be indicated in this situation as in all other possible situations in which client/patient re-assignment may be considered. The overriding consideration in such cases must always be the welfare of the client/patient. In such cases, trainers focus on the trainees' development, recognizing that tensions arising from sincerely held beliefs or values require pedagogical support and time to understand and integrate with standards for professional conduct. Thus trainees entering professional psychology training programs should have no reasonable expectation of being exempted from having any particular category of potential clients/patients assigned to them for the duration of training.

### **Commitment to Transparency in Educational Expectations, Policies and Procedures**

Psychology training programs inform prospective trainees and the public of expected competencies to be attained during training. Publicly available program descriptions and admission materials should include the program's goals and objectives, content about training standards, and the commitment to serving a diverse public. These expectations are reiterated throughout the course of training and in documents such as practicum contracts. Training programs are responsible for notifying prospective trainees, current students and the public that the failure to demonstrate appropriate levels of competence as set forth and assessed by the program could lead to dismissal from the doctoral training program.

### **Commitment to Establishing and Maintaining Standards for Professional Competence to Protect the Public**

As the largest professional and scientific organization of psychologists in the United States, the American Psychological Association (APA) has sought to create, communicate, and apply psychological knowledge for the public's benefit for more than a century. It does this, in part, by establishing a professional code of ethics and standards for professional education and training for practice. These APA documents mandate that education and training programs take reasonable steps to ensure that doctoral-level graduates are prepared to serve a diverse public.

Footnote: This statement was prepared as an educative summary of relevant pedagogical principles applicable to doctoral training of psychologists and is consistent with both the APA Ethics Code (2010) and the *Guidelines and Principles for the Accreditation of Professional Psychology Programs* of the APA's Commission on Accreditation (APA, 2012). APA's Ethics Committee and the Commission on Accreditation are responsible for interpreting and adjudicating these standards. This statement supports and is not intended to supersede either of these documents.