Program accreditation, which serves as a designator of quality based on a review by colleagues external to the institution using standards established by the profession, is playing an increasingly important role in the preparation and credentialing of school psychologists. Doctoral school psychology programs often seek accreditation by the American Psychological Association (APA), which impacts graduate eligibility for an independent practice license in many states. Most specialist and doctoral programs also seek recognition by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which impacts graduate eligibility for national certification and eligibility for a credential to practice in the schools in many states. APA and NASP recognition standards and requirements are discussed and compared. The graduate preparation standards and associated documentation requirements of these two organizations differ in some important respects, but have many commonalities. Both have been impacted by an increasing emphasis in higher education on assessment and documentation of outcomes (vs. inputs and processes), requiring more comprehensive aggregation and use of data for program evaluation and improvement. Despite such requirements, an increasing number of school psychology programs have sought and achieved recognition by APA and/or NASP. The authors discuss possible future trends in accreditation, including a continued move toward outcomes-based assessment, more emphasis on the use of external quality indicators, increased use of technology in both training and documentation, and a greater need for collaboration among higher education faculty, programs, and accrediting organizations. © 2011 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ACCREDITING BODIES

Accrediting bodies effectively are themselves “accredited,” such that requirements by the overarching organizations percolate down through the accreditors’ standards to professional programs. (For a complete history of these various organizations, see Fagan & Wells [2000] and Nelson & Messenger [2003].) Today, two organizations oversee the review and recognition of accreditation bodies: the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the CHEA, a nongovernmental association. The ED serves the government regulatory function by determining whether an accrediting body is a reliable authority on the quality of education offered and, thus, whether the institutions it accredits are eligible to participate in such federal programs as student financial assistance (CHEA, 1998). CHEA’s mission is to promote academic quality and advance self-regulation (Eaton, 1997). At least since 1992, accrediting bodies have been expected to become more prescriptive and rigorous if they are to be recognized by the ED (Nelson & Messinger, 2003).

A Brief History of Accreditation and Approval of School Psychology Programs: The Difference Between Accreditation and Approval

Both the American Psychological Associations (APA) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are authorized by the ED and recognized by CHEA. This gives APA the authority to accredit doctoral programs in psychology, including school psychology, and NCATE the authority to accredit colleges, schools, or departments of education and grant NCATE “National Recognition” to programs within education units that have been judged to meet the standards of NCATE’s specialized professional associations (SPAs). SPAs include more than 20 child-centered, educational leadership, technology, subject-specific, and school specialist organizations, including the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), that have established preparation standards and conduct program reviews within the NCATE system using such standards. Thus, legalistically, NASP derives its “power” to review and approve programs from its affiliation with NCATE and, practically, from the desire of program administrators to better assure graduates that they will qualify for national certification through NASP.

APA Accreditation

APA began accrediting psychology (clinical) programs in 1946 as the result of a direct request from the Veterans Administration in 1945 to identify institutions with adequate facilities for training clinical psychologists (Sears, 1947). In 1953, three counseling psychology programs were the first programs in that specialty to be so accredited. It is interesting to note that the early accreditation of clinical and counseling psychology programs appears to have been based on standards specific to each specialty. By 1973, APA had adopted common criteria for accreditation of professional psychology programs, regardless of specialty (APA, 1973), such that in principle, since that time, APA has accredited “professional psychology” programs, not specialties (e.g., school psychology), per se.

The road to accreditation of school psychology programs was hardly straightforward. For example, the APA Board of Directors initially rejected the proposal to accredit school psychology programs, although the proposed training standards were supported by APA’s Education and Training Board in 1965 (Fagan & Wells, 2000). The University of Texas at Austin holds the honor of having the first APA-accredited program in school psychology, having gained that status in 1971. The number of APA-accredited school psychology doctoral programs increased rapidly for 15 years. Over the past 25 years, these numbers have continued to increase, but at a slower pace (see Figure 1). As of 2011, there were 58 active, APA-accredited programs listed under “school psychology” and an additional seven active programs listed as “combined professional-scientific,” all of which include “school” as one of the combined elements (APA, 2011).
NCATE and NASP Approval

NCATE has had a long and important history in recognizing school psychology programs at all levels. Since 1956, NCATE has accredited both teacher education programs as a whole (or unit) and specific education-related professional programs. In 1962-1963, a school psychology program first appeared in NCATE’s annual list of programs, and by 1968-1969, a category was included specifically for school psychology (Fagan & Wells, 2000).

NASP became an affiliate member of NCATE in 1976 and a constituent member in 1978 (Fagan & Wells, 2000). NASP’s guidelines were the first to be approved by NCATE. They were used as part of an APA/NASP/NCATE joint accreditation project in 1983 and enforced broadly as curriculum guidelines in NCATE visits beginning in the fall of 1984 (Fagan & Wells, 2000). NCATE sanctioned NASP reviews of school psychology programs in 1987, with the first review decisions effective January 1988 (Fagan & Wells, 2000).

NASP reviews are conducted under the auspices of the NASP Program Approval Board, which uses additional selected and trained school psychology professionals to conduct NASP program reviews. Reviewers examine each program independently, with findings then considered by the NASP Program Approval Board. Programs that are NASP approved and whose units are NCATE accredited are granted NCATE “Nationally Recognized” status. NASP also approves programs that are not in NCATE institutions.

The number of NASP-approved programs has grown rapidly since 1988, especially for programs at the specialist level (see Figure 1). As of February 2010, NASP approved 159 specialist and 63 doctoral programs, representing approximately 70% of the total number of programs (NASP, 2010a).

Relationship Among APA, NCATE, and NASP

APA, NCATE, and NASP have had an interesting and complex relationship with regard to accreditation. Because NCATE’s formal recognition of school psychology programs preceded APA accreditation of same, the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) denied APA’s initial petition to accredit school psychology programs as conflicting with NCATE’s previously granted scope of accreditation.
USOE granted APA’s request after APA and NASP (acting as NCATE’s representative) developed an interorganizational task force (Nelson & Messenger, 2003; later, Interorganizational Committee, with an expanded scope), which continued until 2002 when APA withdrew from membership.

More collaboration ensued. In the early 1980s the APA-NASP Task Force, at the encouragement of NCATE, piloted the development of a joint accreditation process that developed a combined standards and procedures manual and conducted six APA/NASP site visits (Fagan & Wells, 2000). This collaboration ended when NCATE withdrew its commitment as the result of changes in the NCATE accreditation process (Nelson & Messenger, 2003). However, NASP later began granting approval to APA-accredited doctoral programs in school psychology if such program’s internship requirements were consistent with NASP standards (D. J. Reschly & M. J. Curtis, personal communication, December 3, 1991).

**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PROGRAM ACCREDITATION**

Without question, the most significant recent development in accreditation has been a move away from using inputs and processes to judge program quality and a concomitant increase in emphasis on outcomes. To a very substantial degree, this shift has been driven by ED requirements through its process of recognizing accrediting organizations. Program reviews were once based largely, if not entirely, on such input measures as incoming student Graduate Record Examination scores, faculty credentials, or library resources and such process measures as required curricula components or the quality and quantity of supervision. Now, virtually every accrediting body requires programs to assess the outcomes of education and use the results to make program improvements.

The move to an outcomes- or performance-based approach to accreditation in education was probably made no more dramatically than by NCATE in its announcement in 1998 that by 2000, all of its SPA standards would be primarily performance based. NCATE’s decision substantially impacted NASP standards and also led NCATE to develop guidelines specifically for assessment of candidate outcomes.

NASP had been the first NCATE SPA to mandate that programs assess and document a candidate’s positive impact on kindergarten through 12th-grade students (NASP, 1994). Nonetheless, the revised NASP standards (NASP, 2000) represented a significant departure from previous versions in the extent to which specific competencies were elaborated. Additionally, standards for assessment and program accountability were increased in the 2000 NASP standards. Programs were required to submit results of either their state school psychology credentialing examination or the Praxis II School Psychology examination.

Similarly, APA’s *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology* (*G & P*), initially adopted in 1995 (Altmaier, 2003), were a sharp departure from APA’s previous “standards,” with a strong accent on an outcomes-based accreditation process. APA’s emphasis on proximal and distal outcome data has increased incrementally, but steadily, to the point that there is little difference between NCATE/NASP and APA in the degree of emphasis on outcome-based assessment.

Another important recent development in program accreditation is the increased emphasis on technology as both a professional skill to be addressed by programs and a means of documenting and communicating candidate outcomes and program characteristics. Electronic portfolios and internship logs are becoming common in programs. As another illustration, the APA’s Commission on Accreditation (CoA, 2011) recently adopted an Implementing Regulation, allowing for a substantial proportion of individual supervision to be done by telecommunications.

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1 In 2008, APA’s 21-member Committee on Accreditation became a 32-member Commission on Accreditation. The abbreviation “CoA” applies to both groups and should be so read throughout this article.
Electronic documentation of candidate outcomes in turn has facilitated aggregation of data across candidates and subsequent submission of program materials and data to accrediting bodies. APA, NCATE/NASP, and other accrediting bodies have all moved, although in varying speeds, toward electronic documentation and submission. Although APA still requires a paper submission for program review, a procedure for electronic submission is under development and expected to be fully implemented by 2013. APA’s required Annual Report has been an online submission since 2000 (S. F. Zlotlow, personal communication, July 22, 2010). In 2004, NCATE implemented a more standardized, electronic program review process, a drastic change from the previous procedures. The NCATE Program Review System allows for web-based submission of a limited amount of background and programmatic information, descriptions and results of six to eight key candidate assessments, a matrix showing how and where candidate assessments address SPA standards, and a description of how results are used to evaluate and improve the program. NASP took more time than other SPAs to pilot and evaluate the online process, but fully adopted the system in 2007.

Program Accreditation/Approval and Credentialing of Individual Graduates

Linking accreditation or approval of programs to the credentialing of their graduates rests on the assumption that “programs meeting accreditation standards do a better job of professional training and that graduates of such programs are better qualified to provide services to the public” (Stigall, 2003, p. 91). In principle, this assumption is testable empirically; in fact, empirical research on this issue is very problematic because the ability of accredited/approved programs to attract higher quality students creates a methodological selection bias that confounds such research (Stigall, 2003). We know of no empirical studies that unambiguously link APA accreditation or NASP approval to the job performance of program graduates.

The Influence of APA Accreditation on Credentialing of Program Graduates

Although APA accreditation began well before most states had psychology licensure laws, the link between accreditation and credentialing is strong. In the vast majority of states, graduating from an APA-approved program fulfills the educational requirements for licensure without further review, and in many states, it is substantially more difficult to qualify for licensure if the applicant is not from an APA-accredited program. However, currently, few states unequivocally require that applicants have graduated from an APA-accredited program. There is, of course, no connection between APA accreditation and state department of education credentialing as a school psychologist, nor to eligibility for the NCSP. However, doctoral school psychologists who wish to practice outside of the schools or who wish to practice within the schools but with the added stature that may accompany licensure, issues surrounding APA accreditation are of substantial importance.

Although few states currently require that applicants for licensure have graduated from APA-accredited programs, APA, as an organization, advocates for this requirement. APA’s current Model Licensure Act (MLA; APA, 2010b), which is intended to serve as a guide for the development of state licensure laws for psychologists, stipulates that graduation from an APA-accredited program, where applicable, is a precondition for eligibility for licensure.2 Interestingly, the previous version of the MLA (APA, 1987) stipulated that after 1995, those seeking licensure must be graduates of an APA-accredited program. Given that, nearly 25 years later, most state licensing boards have not followed APA’s 1987 recommendation on this matter, one wonders whether the 2010 MLA will have any greater effect on actual licensure laws.

2 The MLA includes various exceptions to this rule for graduates of Canadian institutions and those from newly developed programs.
The Influence of NASP Program Approval on State Credentialing Requirements for Practice in the Schools

The influence of NASP standards on the approval of school psychology programs by state departments of education was heightened significantly via the NCATE State Partnership program (Prus & Curtis, 1996). This program, established by NCATE in the late 1980s, has grown to include 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (NCATE, 2009a). The Partnership provides three options for states, one of which is to require training programs to be reviewed by the respective NCATE-affiliated SPA. As of March 2010, 31 states had chosen this option (NCATE, 2010c). Many of the remaining states use SPA standards or those closely aligned thereto.

Although NCATE’s Partnership program focuses on accreditation/program approval, it is highly likely that states adopting SPA program approval standards would also align their credentialing requirements with those standards. To help with this process, NASP has created credentialing standards, which were revised in 2010 (NASP, 2010b).

Relationship Between NASP Program Approval and National Certification

The requirements for the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential, first implemented in 1988, were consistent with both NASP’s training and credentialing standards and have been updated with each revision of those standards. Although one can obtain the NCSP credential without completing an NASP-approved program, graduates from approved programs automatically meet NCSP’s education requirements. Additionally, the documentation required when applying for the NCSP is reduced greatly for graduates of NASP-approved programs. The implementation of the NCSP is one of the most significant events in school psychology over the past 3 decades and created an important link between training at the specialist level and credentialing standards. At present, 31 states use or accept the NCSP requirements in the credentialing of school psychologists (NASP, n.d.).

Accreditation and Approval Standards

Both APA’s (2009) G & P and NASP’s (2010c) Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists are comprehensive and detailed sets of standards. A thorough review of these standards is beyond the scope of this article. Readers are directed to the documents themselves and to the two organizations’ respective websites. Similarly, the rich history of the development of these standards is beyond our scope. Altmaier (2003; APA) and Fagan and Wells (2000; NASP) provide comprehensive discussion of the standards’ histories. What follows is a broad overview of APA and NASP standards and some limited historical context around their development.

A Summary of APA Accreditation Standards

In 1995, APA (2009) adopted the G & P, which have changed little since their initial adoption. From the beginning, the G & P were designed to be outcome oriented and outcome driven, resting on the basic theme that each program: (a) defines its model of training; (b) defines goals, outcomes, and competencies consistent with the training model; (c) develops measures of those outcomes to both assess individual student performance and provide ongoing evaluation of the program itself; and (d) uses the data from the outcomes assessment to guide program improvement.

3APA accredits doctoral programs, internships, and postdoctoral residencies. We acknowledge that all of these types of training programs are relevant to school psychology. However, the scope of this article is limited to issues and trends with regard to accreditation or approval of degree programs.
Table 1
Comparison of APA and NASP Major Curricular Content Requirements

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>APA</th>
<th>NASP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological aspects of, or influences on, behavior</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive aspects of, or influences on, behavior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective aspects of, or influences on, behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social aspects of, or influences on, behavior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>History and systems of psychology</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological measurement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design/methodology; techniques of data analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual differences in behavior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human development</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional behavior or psychopathology</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional standards and ethics</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories and methods of assessment/diagnosis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide practices to promote learning/prevention</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family–school collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis intervention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of cultural and individual diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The G & P are divided into eight domains, as follows: A. Eligibility; B. Program Philosophy, Objectives, and Curriculum Plan; C. Program Resources; D. Cultural and Individual Differences and Diversity; E. Student-Faculty Relations; F. Program Self-Assessment and Quality Enhancement; G. Public Disclosure; and H. Relationship with Accrediting Body. Notwithstanding the broadly stated wording of the domains and the G & P’s dedication to an outcome-based model of accreditation, the G & P include much specificity. The eight domains for doctoral programs subsume 28 numbered points, some of which include several specific sub-requirements. The G & P requirements include structural items (e.g., residency requirements), program processes (e.g., annual written evaluation of all students), program assessment and quality improvement mandates (e.g., systematic program self-assessment), and public disclosure issues. Mandates to address cultural and individual diversity (Domain D and elsewhere) permeate the G & P. Of perhaps principal interest and concern to program faculty are Domain B’s curricular requirements. A common misconception is that the G & P mandate that specific courses be included in the curriculum. This is inaccurate. However, Domain B does include at least 15 distinct areas that must be addressed by the program’s curriculum (see Table 1 for a partial summary). Additionally, Domain B includes a number of structural requirements with regard to programs’ practica.

Although the G & P have changed little since their inception, the implementation of the G & P has changed considerably. Under the G & P, the CoA may adopt implementing regulations (IRs), “which elucidate, interpret, and operationally define [the G & P]” (APA, 2009, p. 5). As of this writing, there are 29 IRs directly applicable to the process of, and criteria for, accrediting doctoral programs and for the operation of accredited programs. IRs have the effect of operationally defining the G & P, such that, for example, a program that easily was re-accredited at an earlier point might be seen as having deficiencies at a subsequent review if the program had not changed its
processes—and maybe even its curriculum—in response to the evolving requirements reflected in subsequently adopted IRs. Therefore, it is essential that programs keep abreast of what, effectively, are the evolving “standards” of APA accreditation by reading the CoA’s publications, attending training sessions, and, where possible, sending a representative to CoA’s periodic Accreditation Assemblies.

A Summary of NASP Program Approval Standards

NASP established its first Guidelines for Training Programs in School Psychology in 1972 (NASP, 1986). NASP training standards were initially approved by NCATE in 1982 for review of school psychology programs at the specialist and doctoral level (NASP, 2000). The 1994 standards were notable for increasing total program requirements from 48 to 54 credits, exclusive of internship and for the new expectation that programs document that their candidates could have a measureable, positive impact on children they serve (NASP, 1994).

The 2000 NASP Standards for Training and Field Placement Programs in School Psychology represented a significant departure from previous standards in several ways. First, the domains of school psychology that had been identified in the 1997 School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice (NASP, 1997) served as the primary basis for “Domains of School Psychology Training and Practice” (NASP, 2000). Second, standards specific to performance-based program assessment and accountability were strengthened or added. This included the standard for programs to employ a systematic process to ensure that all candidates were able to demonstrate a “measureable positive impact on children, youth, families, and other consumers” (NASP, 2000, p.20).

Revised NASP Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010c) were approved by the NASP Delegate Assembly in March 2010. The 2010 NASP standards retain the same basic structural requirements for specialist- and doctoral-level programs, including the minimal number of credit hours and internship requirements. Doctoral programs are expected to add “Greater depth in one or more school psychology competencies identified by the program in its philosophy/mission of doctoral-level preparation and reflected in program goals, objectives, and sequential program of study and supervised practice” (NASP 2010c, p.4). Doctoral programs also retain the option to have candidates complete internships in nonschool settings if candidates have completed at least 600 hours in a school setting through a prior, appropriately supervised specialist-level internship or equivalent experience in school psychology (NASP, 2010c, p. 8).

The new NASP standards (NASP, 2010c) are organized into four areas: I. School Psychology Program Context/Structure; II. Domains of School Psychology Graduate Education and Practice; III. Practica and Internships in School Psychology; and IV. School Psychology Program Support/Resources. The Domains of School Psychology Graduate Education and Practice included in the 2010 NASP standards, along with their corresponding designator/number are listed below:

2.1 Data-Based Decision Making and Accountability
2.2 Consultation and Collaboration
2.3 Interventions and Instructional Support to Develop Academic Skills
2.4 Interventions and Mental Health Services to Develop Social and Life Skills
2.5 School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning
2.6 Preventive and Responsive Services
2.7 Family–School Collaboration Services
2.8 Diversity in Development and Learning
2.9 Research and Program Evaluation
2.10 Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practice
The revised standards would go into effect for all NASP program reviews beginning 18 months after approval by NCATE.

A Comparison of APA and NASP Standards

Contrary to the beliefs of many school psychology trainers, APA and NASP standards are more alike than they are different. We know of no instances in which they are in direct opposition to one another (Table 1 summarizes the major curricular content standards from the two organizations). However, in toto, the two sets of standards require more than either set alone. In part, because of this, participants at the 2010 National Conference on Contemporary Issues in School Psychology Education & Training voiced strong concerns that school psychology programs bear the heavy burden of multiple program reviews that are independent of one another. Increasing curricular and other program requirements stemming from accreditors’ mandates was a universally expressed concern (Strein & Worrell, 2010).

Requirements for Program Documentation

APA Program Documentation Requirements

The APA CoA requires documentation of several types and at several points in the review cycle. By far, the largest amount of documentation occurs at the time of initial or subsequent review. At the time of the review, programs must first submit a comprehensive Self-Study following a detailed set of instructions. Although the narrative portion of the Self-Study is limited presently to 35 pages (CoA, 2010), programs submit large amounts of appended material. The required documentation varies somewhat from program to program, depending on the features of each program. However, for all programs, the required documentation is extensive and includes detailed information in tabular form regarding current and former students, graduates, current faculty, and practicum and internship sites used over a several-year period. Documents that must be submitted include a variety of program and institutional policies, faculty vitae, course syllabi, the program’s student handbook, and sample forms used in student evaluations.

The most important required documentation is aggregated proximal and distal outcome data tied specifically to the program’s stated goals and objectives. Proximal data refer to outcomes while students are in the graduate program, whereas distal data refer to outcomes of program graduates. Examples of proximal outcome data include performance ratings by practicum and internship supervisors or data from rubrics used to score comprehensive exams. Distal outcome data might include job placements of graduates, scores on the Praxis School Psychologist exam or the Examination for the Professional Practice of Psychology (EPPP) national licensure exam (if taken after program completion), or performance ratings by job supervisors. Although the CoA does not require any specific assessment or measure, documentation of student performance measures and the resulting outcome data are key requirements. Of particular importance is the documentation of “minimal levels of achievement” (CoA, 2010, p. 5), that is, minimum thresholds for acceptable student performance.

Accredited doctoral programs must file an Annual Report Online that requires the submission of anonymous, line-item data on all presently enrolled students, recent graduates, and program faculty. These data include demographic characteristics, educational background, professional accomplishments, and proximal and distal student outcomes. As part of a program’s initial or periodic review, a program may have to supply specified additional documentation by a particular due date for review by the CoA.
NASP/NCATE Program Documentation Requirements

The documentation that NASP requires for program reviews focuses on inputs (e.g., faculty qualifications), processes (e.g., course requirements), and substantial documentation of outcomes (e.g., aggregated results of candidate performance assessment). Programs are also expected to show that assessment results are systematically considered and used for program improvement. Prus and Waldron (2008) provide a useful tool for self-analysis of program assessment documentation.

The programmatic documentation required for NASP/NCATE reviews consists of: (a) a program handbook; (b) faculty and student summary tables; (c) transcripts for three recent graduates; (d) documentation of internship policies, requirements, and experiences; and (e) syllabi for required courses (Vasquez, 2009).

NASP requires programs to demonstrate that they address, assess, and attain (in candidates) the NASP domains. The determination of whether each domain is addressed is made through curriculum requirements, syllabi, and transcripts showing that required courses are completed. The determination that domains are assessed and attained is made using descriptions and aggregated data for the following six assessment methods. Up to two additional assessments may also be submitted.

1. Summary of program completer performance on the state school psychology credentialing examination or on the Praxis II School Psychology exam.
2. Program or course-embedded assessment of candidate knowledge.
3. Assessment of students during practica that shows they can effectively plan and carry out school psychological services.
4. Intern evaluations by field supervisors.
5. Summary of the results of a comprehensive, performance-based assessment of candidate abilities evaluated by faculty during internship.
6. Assessment demonstrating that candidates are able to integrate domains of knowledge and apply professional skills in delivering a comprehensive range of services evidenced by a measurable positive impact on children, youth, families, and other consumers (this need not be a separate assessment if it is addressed by assessment no. 5).

Although these core assessment requirements are likely to remain in place for some time because they correspond to NCATE requirements, changes/clarifications will likely occur after revised NASP standards are approved by NCATE.

Comparison of APA and NASP/NCATE Program Documentation Requirements

Although there is some required documentation that is unique to NASP and APA, most of the major types of documentation are common to both systems. Differences are due substantially to two factors: (a) NCATE both requires NASP to include some documentation that NASP would likely not do otherwise and prohibits NASP from collecting certain types of information; and (b) APA accreditation includes a site visit, such that some documentation may not be required to be submitted to the CoA but likely would be reviewed by the site visit team. Table 2 provides a side-by-side comparison of documentation requirements.

Future Trends in Accreditation

There has been a substantial, steady increase in school psychology programs seeking and attaining accreditation/approval over the past several decades (see Figure 1), although this growth has slowed in later years, particularly for doctoral programs. Given the increasing emphasis on national standards and the link between accreditation and credentialing for both school-based and independent practice, we expect this trend to continue.
Table 2
Summary of APA and NASP Documentation Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Documentation</th>
<th>APA</th>
<th>NASP</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional policies</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Program policies</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required courses, practicum, and other curricular content</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program handbook</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course syllabi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample transcripts of graduates</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample internship agreement and logs</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty qualification (NASP: summary table; APA: individual vita)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on student characteristics (line-item; APA only)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggregated results of student performance (proximal indicators)</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregated distal data (e.g., job placements)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of data for program improvement</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ performance on the Praxis examination or state exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program- or course-embedded assessment of student knowledge</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of students during practica</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intern evaluations by field supervisors</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary of the results of a comprehensive, performance-based</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>assessment of candidate abilities during internship</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Assessment showing students’ positive impact on clients</td>
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Continuing calls for accountability in education from kindergarten to graduate school virtually assure that accrediting authorities will continue to move toward outcome-based assessment and away from an input and process orientation. School psychology programs will likely face increased pressures to demonstrate the necessity for and effectiveness of costly and time-consuming preparation. An outcomes-oriented approach would presumably provide programs with greater flexibility in some of the processes by which they conduct their business, but that is likely to come at the expense of more rigid requirements for assessment.

One danger in a heavily outcomes-based approach to accreditation is that it increases substantially faculty time and effort required for performance assessment of candidates without providing “protections” for faculty afforded by input and process standards. Unlike such documentation as course syllabi and program handbooks, there is little “economy of scale” in candidate performance assessment. Faculty motivation and credit for program-assessment-related work are important issues, especially at research universities where service commitments may run counter to university tenure and promotion criteria.

A newer concern with a heavily outcomes-oriented assessment relates to the possibility of applying external criteria to the outcomes. Thus far, both APA and NASP have been satisfied with accepting each program’s definition of its own judgment of adequacy of outcomes, unless such program-defined criteria were absurd on their face. Under pressure from the ED, APA has begun to more strongly stress “thresholds for acceptable performance,” such as attrition rates, time to degree, acceptance rate into internships, and changes in student/faculty ratios (CoA, 2011, IR D4-7). Although nascent, a trend toward accreditor-imposed performance criteria is worrisome to some.

Notwithstanding workload concerns, pressures to develop and validate performance assessment at a time of limited resources may create more impetus for programs and faculty to share ideas and tools. Evidence of this can be seen in NCATE’s assessment library (NCATE, 2010a) and a plan...
by the new NASP Graduate Education Workgroup and collaborating organizations, such as APA’s Division 16, Trainers in School Psychology, Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs, and others to establish an online faculty resource sharing tool.

The increasingly important role of technology in both program assessment and accreditation will no doubt continue in the future. Requirements for programs to aggregate and analyze performance indicators, portfolio review outcomes, and other data make the use of electronic data systems critical. Technology also holds promise for such performance assessment as standardized case simulations. However, the technology involved in the accreditation process, while offering efficiency of communication, also has the potential to overshadow or even drive other important aspects of the process. An example of that may be found in the creation of NCATE’s online program review system that, despite its advantages, necessarily places limits on the kinds of information, assessments, and data that may be submitted.

Developments within NCATE could well impact NASP program review and approval. NCATE is under pressure from institutions to make its accreditation process, and especially its program review standards and process, more economical, functional, and relevant to universities. NCATE’s recently adopted guidelines for SPA standards (NCATE, 2009b) include strict limits on the number and levels of standards that SPAs may have and prohibit programmatic standards (e.g., standards for faculty, curricula, and credit hours) unless an SPA can make a case as to why such standards are justified. The 2010 NASP standards and associated documentation requirements were submitted to NCATE for review in the fall of 2010, but as of June 2011, were still being revised to correspond to new NCATE guidelines and had not yet been approved.

Another potential development that may impact the future of NASP program review is NCATE’s recent merger with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP; NCATE, 2010b). Although an important goal in the formation of CAEP was to establish a single voice for the preparation of educational professionals, one of CAEP’s fundamental principles is to offer applicants for accreditation a choice of options. It is likely that program reviews will continue to be a part of the NCATE/CAEP process, especially given that many states have come to rely on SPA reviews for state approval. However, the form and long-term role of such reviews in any consolidated organization will evolve over the next few years and will very likely include multiple options for new and continuing reviews.

Long-standing philosophical differences in entry-level degree requirements for school psychologists between APA and NASP and recent tensions around changes that had been proposed in the APA Model Licensure Act might lead to the obvious conclusion that the two organizations are as far apart as ever and not likely to collaborate on important accreditation issues. However, NASP, NCATE, and APA once collaborated to pave the way for APA accreditation of school psychology programs, and NASP and APA once worked effectively together to create and pilot a joint accreditation process. That same spirit of collaboration could be brought to bear on reducing the demands and costs of multiple accreditations on school psychology programs, improving the quality of preparation of school candidates at all levels, and enhancing the effectiveness of school psychologists in providing a range of services that positively impacts children, families, and schools.

REFERENCES


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