

Not all worth knowing about psychology is taught in graduate school: Or...What I learned on the CPA Accreditation Panel

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As I move into my third and final year as the student member of the CPA Accreditation Panel and prepare to complete my clinical psychology training at the University of Ottawa I am taking a pause to reflect on this experience and, as the first student member, to share some of my thoughts and feelings about this formative experience.

This goal of this reflection is both to attempt to inspire other like-minded students to apply for the upcoming vacancy for a student member and to affirm the importance and validity of the decision to have a student on the panel.

What have I learned?

As a would-be academic, I have had the opportunity to learn invaluable lessons about the development and implementation of programming in clinical psychology, which will serve me well as I begin the administrative and developmental tasks of becoming an active member of faculty. I have learned that issues facing clinical psychology programs and internships are far more diverse and complex than the view from a student's eyes would suggest. Issues such as the uniquely Canadian understanding of diversity, CPA first or only accreditation of programs versus APA accreditation, accreditation of School Psychology programs, the potential issue of Psy.D. programs in Canada, mid-career training opportunities for Masters level

practitioners, the importance of succession planning as the current cohort of later career academics moves towards retirement, balancing rigorous training with lengthening program completion times and many other important and current issues in psychology training in Canada have been debated and addressed during my tenure on the panel. These "behind the scenes" issues are rarely visible to students yet have significant implications for training and the future of the profession. As I move into the job market and begin my search for a position, I feel as though I am a very informed applicant who is aware of the vast diversity in training opportunities in clinical psychology in Canada and some of the issues that will face training programs over the next many years.

As a future professional member of CPA I have had the opportunity to learn about and try on one possible way of participating in CPA and to witness and learn about others. As a panel member the meetings are only twice a year and the workload is manageable and interesting. Having the opportunity to take an in-depth walk through programs other than the one in which I am currently enrolled has been enlightening and fascinating. At the same time the responsibility to the profession and to the quality of the training experience for students is palpable and omnipresent in the deliberations of the panel and I have developed a deep respect for all that goes

into my training at the levels of both my faculty and administration and the professional organization. I have also had a small window into the complexity of programming issues that occupy the time and talent of faculty above and beyond their formative role in my didactic and clinical training.

I have learned about the role of the site visitor, the time that is required for this undertaking and this interesting opportunity to travel within the country, learn more about another internship or psychology program and to take on the important role of the eyes and ears of the panel.

Similarly, I have learned through association about other possible future roles for myself within our professional organization including board and committee membership and other areas of advocacy in the community or politically. I have witnessed the response and participation of CPA to issues such as the Romanow Report and to the legalization of same sex marriage in parts of Canada. This experience has made it clear to me that there will be a continued role for me to play in our professional organization that will meet my professional responsibility to support the ongoing development of the profession and my personal interest in advocating for the important role of psychology in the lives of Canadians.

What have I offered?

As a student I have brought the eyes and ears of the students' experience more closely to the deliberations of the panel. Site visitors speak to groups of students in their work with programs but having a student sitting around the table continuing to raise issues that may have an impact on training adds a depth to the discussions and, I would argue,

greater validity to the decisions made on behalf of students. My presence has reminded the members of the panel of issues facing students on a personal level as I have moved through my thesis proposal, comprehensive examinations, internship application and interview process and now the arduous tasks completing the writing of my thesis while engaged in the challenges of the internship experience. As I have moved through these stages, they have become real and tangible within the panel in a different way than can be brought to the group by the site visitors report and self-study or through the foggy reminiscence of memory.

I have gently challenged some of the underlying ideas behind the term "the students" which is sometimes spoken in a way that seems to say that we are all the same and face all of the same issues, want the same things and are one big bundle of studentness. The panel has, I believe, expanded its view of "the students" to be inclusive of our differing needs and natures. It is a bit like the old stereotype research...students are all alike until you meet a few in person and then all of a sudden the "student" stereotype becomes more detailed and in-depth. I believe that I have offered the panel some of that detail and diversity.

As a mature student, I have raised the voice of those who progress through professional psychology training while balancing the multiple roles of mother, worker, student and partner. While this has not been the norm in clinical psychology programs historically, changing demographics and increasing numbers of students having children while still in their training makes these factors more likely to impinge on issues such as completion times and outside work responsibilities for students. Sadly, the more demands there are on our time, the less

likely we will be to participate in activities such as CPA committees or roles that will bring these student realities to the attention of those who could advocate for change and increased support for mature students who bring a wealth of life experience and strength to the profession.

As a member of a minority sexual orientation, I have continued to raise the importance of including all groups in definitions of diversity used to evaluate programs and to point out issues that could potentially bias against or silence minority students. The ongoing discussion of diversity in Canadian programs has been one area of debate that I have waded into deeply, with gusto and pride in the growing assertiveness of Canadian psychology of our unique linguistic diversity, our ‘different’ ethnic groupings and the importance of including sexual orientation and disability in definitions of diversity. This is a voice that is not unique to my role as the student member but which has been welcomed with responsiveness and respect.

What have I received?

I have received a unique training opportunity that has given me insight into my current training experience and my future life as an academic. This has added so much to my experience as a student and to my sense of well being that I am receiving an education that has been developed with such care and attention to detail and quality. This experience has reasserted my desire to pursue an academic career and broadened

my understanding of what that career might look like. This experience has deepened my commitment to participation in CPA throughout my career.

But you might ask, “are there any perks?” Well, on a completely different note I had the opportunity to participate in conferences and workshops on issues related to accreditation, to stay in a real hotel room all by myself for the first time in my 36 years of life, I was fed warm and delicious food at regular intervals not prepared by myself or any member of my immediate family, they gave me a really nice travel mug and a CPA pin, I got to meet people I had only ever read about and thought “wow that’s a really neat person” and I don’t feel lonely at CPA conferences anymore. On top of all of that I feel as though I know more about what being a psychologist might really mean. I have come to more fully know some of my future colleagues and find that even though we are all very different there is respect and tolerance such that I can finally imagine myself as a psychologist and member of the profession. This was an image that was difficult for me to form in my mind and that I struggled with as an older student, mother, lesbian, feminist, activist and someone who had had a number of other careers before coming to psychology.

I have been invited in and accepted for all that I bring and have been given an opportunity to share my thoughts and to join the debate. To me, this is very much the essence of what will build a strong and vibrant future for the profession of psychology in Canada.