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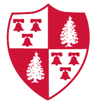

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A multilevel framework for recruiting and supporting graduate students from culturally diverse backgrounds in school psychology programs

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Abstract

The lack of cultural diversity among practitioners and trainers in the field of school psychology has been recognized as a longstanding problem. In particular, individuals from racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority and international backgrounds often encounter a range of barriers to pursuing graduate study in school psychology. Given the urgent need to increase diversity among school psychologists, faculty and institutions must take proactive measures to deconstruct these barriers and to support the success of all students. This article outlines a multilevel framework for recruiting and supporting graduate students from culturally diverse backgrounds in school psychology programs. Within this framework, research-based strategies are presented at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of support. Moreover, considerations for assessing program and student outcomes are discussed, and applications to school psychology programs internationally are considered.

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Diversity, graduate school, multi-tiered system of support, recruitment, school psychology

Historically, practitioners from culturally diverse backgrounds, including individuals from racially, ethnically, and linguistically (REL) diverse backgrounds, have been significantly underrepresented in the field of school psychology (e.g. Proctor, Simpson, Levin, & Hackimer, 2014). Recent data gathered by Curtis, Castillo, and Gelley (2012) indicate that the majority of school psychologists in the United States (US) identify as Caucasian (nearly 91%), whereas only 3.4% identify as Hispanic, 3% identify as African American, 1.3% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.6% identify as multiracial or another race/ethnicity. Data describing the linguistic backgrounds of school psychologists in the US are less complete; however, estimates of the percentage of practicing school psychologists who are fluent in more than one language range from 10.7% to 47.6% (Charvat, 2008; Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2012; Proctor et al., 2014).

Regarding the representation of individuals from international backgrounds, data are also incomplete. A recent survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) indicated that approximately 20% of individuals who earned doctoral degrees in psychology and other social science fields in the US were temporary visa holders, a category that includes international students. However, this estimate is not representative of students who earned non-doctoral degrees and includes individuals who pursued studies in a range of fields other than school psychology.

Data regarding the racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of students in school psychology programs outside of the US also are sparse. However, some data from the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) have described the linguistic backgrounds of practicing school psychologists in a number of countries (e.g. Jimerson et al., 2006). Although estimates of the percentage of practitioners who are fluent in two or more languages are relatively low in countries such as Australia (approximately 8%), estimated percentages of bilingual and multilingual practitioners are higher in countries such as Germany (approximately 77%; Jimerson et al., 2006).

As indicated by the aforementioned data, the range of cultural diversity among practitioners in the field of school psychology is severely limited. Broadly, the term *culture* is used to describe the collective attitudes, behavioral patterns, beliefs and values shared by individuals from a particular background (Betancourt & López, 1993). Although this term may encompass a number of identity dimensions (e.g. ethnicity and religion), this article focuses on the recruitment and retention of graduate students from racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds that are traditionally underrepresented in the field of school psychology. In addition to including many minority groups, underrepresented groups often include students from international backgrounds. In the present article, the term *minority* refers to a

group of individuals that occupy a subordinate position in society due to pervasive prejudice and discrimination (Phinney, 1996). Notably, the terms 'underrepresented' and 'minority' refer to different populations when discussing various training programs internationally. For example, in the US, individuals from African American, Hispanic, and Native American backgrounds are historically recognized as minority populations and are conspicuously underrepresented in school psychology programs. In Estonia, which has a growing Russian minority population, few Russian students graduate from academic institutions as school psychologists (Kikas, 2014). As in US training programs, faculty in many countries report difficulties in recruiting graduate students from minority backgrounds as well as in preparing students to meet the needs of minority youth in schools (Kikas, 2014; Lam, 2014; Schad, 2014).

Ultimately, the underrepresentation of minority populations in the field of school psychology has been recognized as problematic for a number of reasons (e.g. Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). First, a lack of cultural diversity among practitioners and academicians inevitably limits the range of perspectives, experiences, and talents represented in the field. A broad range of perspectives is critical for promoting innovation and creative problem-solving. Moreover, the representation of diverse individuals in the field increases the likelihood that previously underserved populations will have their needs appropriately recognized and addressed (Rogers & Molina, 2006).

Despite advocacy for recruitment initiatives by professional organizations (e.g. National Association of School Psychologists), research investigating effective strategies for recruiting and supporting school psychology students from REL underrepresented backgrounds is scarce (Bocanegra, 2012). Moreover, among studies of effective recruitment strategies, few have investigated the application of these strategies to training programs outside of the US. In addition to generating additional research in this area, one critical step toward increasing diversity among graduate students may involve the development of research-based recruitment and retention models designed specifically for school psychology programs (Bocanegra, 2012). For example, Proctor and Truscott (2013) described a three-pronged model for recruiting African American school psychologists; however, its relevance for recruiting practitioners from other backgrounds is unknown.

Given the above considerations, the purpose of this article is two-fold: 1) to identify barriers to pursuing graduate education in psychology that are commonly experienced by individuals from REL underrepresented backgrounds, including minority and international students; and 2) to outline a research-based multilevel framework for recruiting and supporting diverse student bodies in school psychology programs. Presently, the majority of research on the diversification of graduate psychology programs has investigated the recruitment of US citizens from REL underrepresented backgrounds to US institutions. Additionally, a growing body of research has examined the experiences and needs of international graduate students in adjusting to academic programs in the US. However, relatively little research has focused on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations

(including minority and international students) in graduate training programs outside of the US. This dearth of research is concerning, as a lack of cultural diversity in school psychology graduate programs has been recognized as an international problem (Kikas, 2014; Lam, 2014; Schad, 2014). Given the above considerations, this article is intended to provide a foundation for graduate institutions (both in the US and internationally) in structuring training programs that are better prepared to recruit and support culturally diverse student bodies. International applications are highlighted where appropriate, and critical gaps in the existing literature are identified.

Barriers to graduate education

Individuals from REL underrepresented backgrounds often encounter a range of barriers to pursuing graduate study in psychology (Zhou et al., 2004). These difficulties may be experienced prior to enrollment as well as during graduate school. For example, prospective students may be discouraged from applying to graduate programs by the limited and/or stereotypical representation of racial and ethnic minorities in psychology curricula, textbooks, and other course materials (Lott & Rogers, 2011). Once enrolled in graduate programs, students from ethnic minority backgrounds report significantly higher exposure to prejudice and microaggressions (i.e. subtle interactions that communicate demeaning messages), which in turn is associated with lower levels of perceived social support and academic engagement (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene 2012). Moreover, minority students report receiving less support and mentorship from trainers and faculty members in US institutions than do individuals from majority backgrounds (Lott & Rogers, 2011).

In particular, international students may experience a number of additional stressors that can impact their educational success. For example, these students often are far away from close family members, and various linguistic and cultural barriers may prevent them from connecting with peers and faculty in their new academic settings. Family, cohort peers, and faculty members are critical sources of social support for graduate psychology students, and limited access to these supports may negatively impact students' training experiences (Brown, Daly, & Leong, 2009; El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002). Consequently, many international graduate students report experiencing emotional or stress-related problems that significantly interfere with their well-being and academic performance (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006).

Collectively, the aforementioned barriers present significant problems for recruiting and supporting culturally diverse student bodies in school psychology programs. These barriers put students at risk for social isolation, academic difficulties, and ultimately, for program dropout. Thus, it is critical that graduate educators provide culturally responsive program supports that are effective in promoting the educational success of all students.

Multi-tiered systems of support at the graduate level

The term 'multi-tiered system of support' (MTSS) refers to a model of service delivery in which educational supports are arranged hierarchically to correspond with students' universal and more targeted needs. The MTSS framework has roots in the public health model of prevention and intervention as well as in problem-solving methodology (Bergan, 1977; Merrell & Buchanan, 2006; Tilly, 2008). The public health model is a multilevel framework of service delivery that is grounded in prevention science and therefore calls for the use of research-based practices to guide intervention and decision-making. Typically, services are made available at three levels of prevention and intervention: Namely, the primary (Tier 1), secondary (Tier 2), and tertiary (Tier 3) levels. Primary supports are provided to all students in an educational setting and are designed to promote a range of positive outcomes (e.g. academic and psychosocial well-being). At the secondary, supports become more targeted and may be accessed by individuals who exhibit elevated risk for negative academic or mental health outcomes. These services often are delivered in group-based formats. Finally, services at the tertiary level constitute the most intensive and specialized supports and often are delivered in individualized formats.

As applied in the field of school psychology, MTSS models often are situated in ecological systems theory, which conceptualizes the development of individuals in the context of multiple, interconnected environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). This theory posits that individuals and their environments are mutually influencing and inextricably linked. Thus, problems experienced by the individual (e.g. adjustment, social, emotional, and academic difficulties) are conceptualized as a discordance between individual factors (e.g. existing knowledge and skills) and environmental factors (e.g. institutional demands and supports; Burns, 2011). Moreover, these problems are considered to reside within person-environment interactions rather than within individuals. As a result, interventions for academic, social, and emotional difficulties are focused primarily on making environmental modifications that allow institutions to better meet the individual's needs (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

As noted above, the MTSS framework also has discernable roots in problem-solving approaches. These approaches call for the use of a multi-step process to identify problems, consider relevant variables contributing to these problems (e.g. program and environmental factors), implement appropriate interventions, and evaluate outcomes. A fundamental mechanism of problem-solving methods is the use of formative and summative assessment data to adjust and evaluate supports. Overall, MTSS models vary to some degree across settings; however, some common features of these models include a multilevel framework, a focus on both prevention and intervention, evidence-based services, and an emphasis on formative evaluation of individual and group progress (Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

Traditionally, MTSS models have been conceptualized and implemented in the context of primary and secondary settings (i.e. K-12 schools) rather than

postsecondary settings. However, we contend that these models also are applicable at the postsecondary level, given the wide range of academic, social, and emotional needs of graduate students. In adapting a MTSS for graduate programs, several fundamental assumptions must be considered. First, in traditional K-12 settings, students rarely self-select to access supports at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. At the graduate level, however, students are capable of reflecting on their interests and needs and subsequently selecting the activities and services that best suit them. While faculty can advise students and inform them of available supports, it is ultimately incumbent on the students themselves to evaluate their time commitments and to identify activities of interest. Second, it should be noted that the supports recommended below are intended to benefit *all* students in school psychology graduate programs. While many of the recommendations below are especially pertinent for supporting individuals from REL underrepresented backgrounds, they are valuable for promoting culturally responsive training practices and increasing networks of social support for all individuals in school psychology programs.

Tier 1 supports

As described above, Tier 1 interventions are designed to foster the success of all students and to establish environments that are welcoming and supportive of individuals from diverse backgrounds. In line with ecological systems theory, this involves targeting multiple interrelated environmental systems, including peer, program, and institutional communities. Specifically, it involves ensuring diverse representation among students and faculty as well as providing these individuals with the resources they need to be successful in academic settings. Providing comprehensive core supports also entails placing a significant emphasis on training in multicultural foundations and competencies (Newell et al., 2010; Rogers, 2006; Rogers & Molina, 2006). The following describes recruitment and retention strategies that can be implemented by school psychology programs in order to diversify their respective student bodies and ensure strong universal program supports.

Recruitment. Because recruitment efforts involve reaching out to a wide range of individuals to generate interest in graduate programs, they are most appropriately conceptualized as Tier 1 initiatives. In the US, a growing body of research has provided insight into the perspectives of prospective minority students in exploring graduate psychology programs (e.g. Chandler, 2011; Ponterotto et al., 1995). For example, Chandler (2011) identified several promising strategies for recruiting Black students to school psychology programs. Specifically, participants in this study expressed interest in learning about potential connections between their communities and the field, including the implications of graduate training for uplifting the Black community and the ways in which Black culture and perspectives were integrated in program curricula. This information is critical for developing targeted recruitment efforts, which are commonly employed by successful US

graduate psychology programs with a distinct multicultural emphasis (Hammond & Yung, 1993; Rogers, 2006; Rogers & Molina, 2006).

To increase awareness of their programs, school psychology faculty and students can disseminate a wide variety of recruitment materials, including brochures, student handbooks, web-based resources, and application packets. Ponterotto et al. (1995) identified several types of information commonly sought by prospective minority students in reviewing graduate application materials, including information about faculty and student demographics, financial aid packages, curricula, and faculty research interests. Programs that explicitly describe their commitment to diversity issues may be especially appealing to individuals from minority backgrounds (Rogers, 2006). Additionally, prospective students may be particularly interested in programs that employ diverse faculty with multicultural interests. Notably, higher ethnic minority student representation in US graduate psychology programs is positively associated with the proportion of minority faculty represented as well as the proportion of faculty conducting research on minority issues (Muñoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999).

Other effective strategies for increasing diversity among school psychology graduate students include forging relationships with undergraduate institutions that historically serve individuals of color (Rogers & Molina, 2006). Specifically, faculty can solicit referrals for promising students from undergraduate faculty and other contacts who may know of interested candidates. Once potential candidates have been identified, faculty should make personal contact with these individuals to answer questions, suggest opportunities for potential research collaborations, and describe program requirements and curricula (Hammond & Yung, 1993; Rogers, 2006). This may be especially important for generating interest in programs among international students, who may have difficulty coordinating campus visits.

Furthermore, providing comprehensive financial aid packages is a valuable strategy for recruiting and supporting graduate students from REL underrepresented backgrounds (Chandler, 2011; Proctor et al., 2014; Rogers, 2006). School psychology programs may offer both internally and externally funded fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships to support students (Rogers, 2006). As compared with training programs in other countries, school psychology programs in the US offer relatively little financial support for non-doctoral level graduate students (Oakland & Hatzichristou, 2014). For example, graduate students in training programs in England may receive full tuition remission and a monthly stipend, and students in Greek universities receive full tuition remission (Oakland & Hatzichristou, 2014). However, it is unclear whether increased financial support is linked to minority student recruitment in training programs outside of the US.

Finally, efforts to increase awareness of the field of school psychology early on are critical for generating interest among prospective candidates and ensuring their preparedness to enter graduate programs (e.g. Chandler, 2011). These strategies may include offering undergraduate courses in school psychology, providing opportunities for students to work with school-based practitioners prior to graduate school, reaching out to high school students through career fairs and mentoring

activities, and visiting undergraduate classrooms (Proctor et al., 2014). Outreach efforts may be initiated by faculty, current students, and alumni.

Retention. Once students are enrolled in graduate school, it is critical that programs provide comprehensive, universal supports to ensure their academic success. As noted above, an emerging body of research has investigated the practices of US graduate psychology programs that have been particularly successful in supporting diverse student bodies (e.g. Hammond & Yung, 1993; Rogers, 2006). One common characteristic of these programs is their strong emphasis on developing students' multicultural competencies. Broadly defined, multicultural competencies refer to the range of sensitivities, knowledge, and behaviors necessary to successfully provide services to individuals from diverse backgrounds (Wallace, 2000; Newell et al., 2010).

Training standards developed by the International School Psychology Association (ISPA; Cunningham & Oakland, 1998) as well as other professional organizations, such as the National Association of School Psychologists (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010) and the British Psychological Society (British Psychological Society; 2014), call for the inclusion of multicultural training in graduate psychology programs. Research on the impact of high-quality multicultural education in graduate psychology programs in the US suggests that it is associated with a variety of positive outcomes, including increased self-reported multicultural counseling competence and more mature racial identity attitudes (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Neville et al., 1996). Participant outcomes in this body of research have varied somewhat by study design, participant, and intervention characteristics; however, multicultural education that is firmly grounded in relevant theory and research has been demonstrated to be especially effective (Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006). Given the numerous barriers that students from minority backgrounds may encounter during graduate school, this type of education is critical for cultivating attitudes of mutual respect and acceptance within training programs.

Currently, several types of multicultural training models are prevalent in graduate psychology programs in the US. Specifically, these include models that devote one course to diversity issues (separate course models), models that offer a specialization in multiculturalism (area of concentration models), models that integrate diversity courses from other disciplines (interdisciplinary models), and models that call for the integration of multicultural content across the curriculum (integration models; Newell et al., 2010). Presently, research suggests that integrated models coupled with separate courses in multicultural education may be the most effective approach to developing students' knowledge and competencies (Newell et al., 2010; Rogers, 2006). This combination allows graduate educators to provide intensive, focused studies of multicultural foundations while also gradually building students' multicultural competencies through other relevant coursework (Newell et al., 2010). Multicultural education includes not only traditional classroom instruction but also clinical and field-based training (e.g. practicum and internship

experiences). In successful US graduate programs with a strong multicultural emphasis, students are given opportunities to work with diverse clientele and field supervisors (Rogers, 2006).

Training programs outside of the US may be less likely to offer separate coursework in multicultural foundations and international school psychology (Oakland & Hatzichristou, 2014). Rather, multicultural training often is integrated across a range of assessment and intervention coursework throughout the curriculum (Oakland & Hatzichristou, 2014). One noteworthy barrier to providing robust multicultural training in some school psychology programs is that much of the literature addressing these issues is written in English and reflects Western perspectives on service delivery. This impacts the accessibility and applicability of this literature to graduate programs in Eastern countries as well as programs that primarily enroll students who are not proficient in reading academic articles in English (Lam, 2014; Schad, 2014). However, many faculty in programs outside of the US maintain strong ties to international school psychology, and as a result, their students gain rich insight into multicultural issues through cross-cultural research collaborations, active involvement in ISPA, and participation in exchange programs (Oakland & Haztichristou, 2014).

Other types of Tier 1 supports include universal advising services in which each student is assigned a faculty mentor. Faculty advising is critical for promoting students' career satisfaction, academic persistence, and career development in graduate psychology programs (Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009; Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003). Among other responsibilities, graduate faculty should communicate empathy and positive regard, expose mentees to a variety of orientations and methods, and model values of integrity and ethical decision-making (Brown et al., 2009). Because graduate trainers from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds are severely underrepresented in school psychology programs (Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2011), faculty must be well-prepared to provide effective cross-cultural mentorship. For graduate educators, this involves the continual pursuit of cross-cultural knowledge and competencies. It also requires faculty to demonstrate an appreciation of the mentee's uniqueness within his or her own culture and a well-grounded understanding of the barriers that minority students often encounter in academic institutions (Johnson, 2002).

Finally, Tier 1 strategies for supporting culturally diverse graduate students should extend beyond the efforts of individual programs and departments to include initiatives undertaken by larger institutions (i.e. the colleges and universities that house these programs). Faculty in US graduate programs with exemplary multicultural training and diverse student bodies report having access to a wide variety of supports from their institutions (Rogers, 2006; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Tori & Ducker, 2004). Institutions can support faculty by hosting colloquia and professional development opportunities to increase multicultural knowledge, offering funding for research projects that center on diversity issues, providing incentives for hiring minority faculty, and awarding funding and release time to faculty contributing to multicultural initiatives on campus. For students, institutions can

fund minority visitation programs, offer graduate assistantships and other financial aid options, and provide support for student cultural groups on campus. Collectively, these supports convey a welcoming attitude toward students from diverse backgrounds and better enable faculty to move forward with initiatives that increase cultural diversity in their respective programs.

Tiers 2 supports

Despite faculty's attempts to create graduate programs that are welcoming of cultural diversity, prejudicial attitudes and behaviors persist (Tori & Ducker, 2004). These behaviors can have a significant impact on the well-being of minority students and can contribute to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, rejection, and social isolation (e.g. Clark et al., 2012; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009). As a result, students from minority backgrounds may experience mental exhaustion and decreased academic engagement, which can significantly impact their performance in graduate school (Clark et al., 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2009). Ultimately, students from minority backgrounds may express interest in resources and supports to assist them in developing coping strategies (e.g. Chandler, 2011).

It is critical that school psychology programs provide targeted supports for overcoming the numerous institutional and social barriers that may impede the academic success of minority graduate students. At both Tiers 2 and 3, these supports may consist of services and resources that are available to all students (regardless of their cultural backgrounds) but that are accessed only by those who demonstrate interest or need. Such supports may be beneficial to both minority and non-minority students alike but may be especially helpful in counteracting the unique stressors experienced by students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. Because many of these supports can be provided at varying levels of intensity (e.g. with varying frequency and numbers of participants), they can be conceptualized and adapted as either secondary or tertiary supports. Overall, faculty should acknowledge that individuals from diverse backgrounds may prefer different types of supports and coping strategies (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

Given the importance of social support in graduate school, it is crucial that faculty implement strategies to increase feelings of connectedness among students. For example, peer mentoring in graduate psychology programs is associated with increased psychosocial adjustment, instrumental support (i.e. access to information and resources), professional identify development, and satisfaction with peer relationships (Bowman, Bowman, & DeLucia, 1990; Murdock, Stipanovic, & Lucas, 2013). When all students are required to participate in peer mentoring or supervision, these activities are best conceptualized as Tier 1 supports. However, many school psychology programs offer universal mentoring supports for novice students only (rather than for students in the later stages of graduate training). Peer mentoring efforts for students in the later stages of graduate school may be especially beneficial, given the high levels of stress associated with developing a dissertation,

securing sustainable financial support, and fulfilling other obligations (Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001). Coordinating these supports may present some challenges, as many advanced students leave campus for internships or dissertation work. However, some evidence suggests that electronic forms of communication, or 'e-mentoring', may confer a number of benefits for both mentors and mentees (Hixenbaugh, Dewart, Drees, & Williams, 2006; Murdock et al., 2013).

In traditional MTSS models, Tier 2 services often are provided in the form of group-based supports. School psychology programs and higher education institutions can offer a range of group supports to assist students from diverse backgrounds in adjusting to graduate school. For example, faculty-led advising and support groups may be especially beneficial for augmenting international students' social support networks and for imparting valuable information about teaching, the academic job market, and other topics (Ku, Lahman, Yeh, & Cheng, 2008). Other types of group-based supports, such as stress management courses, may be especially valuable for educating graduate students about the nature and impact of stress as well as reducing their perceived stress levels (Abel, Abel, & Smith, 2012).

Additional activities, such as student interest groups, may allow students from diverse backgrounds to establish relationships with peers and bolster their social support networks on campus (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010). For example, student groups dedicated to discussing topics such as social justice issues on campus, current events, and suggestions for improving program supports may afford students from minority backgrounds opportunities to validate their personal experiences and affirm their professional goals. Conducting these groups within departments (rather than through other campus offices) may help students to feel more included in the culture of their respective graduate programs (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010).

Tier 3 supports

To increase the intensity of services beyond Tiers 1 and 2, Tier 3 supports often are more individualized. As noted previously, many of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports described above can be adjusted to achieve greater intensity by altering their frequency, duration, focus, and format. For example, while basic one-to-one faculty advising often is provided as a universal support in graduate psychology programs, faculty advisors can provide increased levels of support to students by scheduling more frequent meetings, providing more immediate feedback, and offering both psychosocial and instrumental supports. Whereas instrumental support refers to professional mentoring activities (e.g. career-related discussions), psychosocial support involves addressing personal needs (e.g. conversations about students' adjustment to graduate school; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). High-quality advising may be especially important for promoting research productivity, career development, and other positive student outcomes (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Schlosser et al., 2003).

One critical strategy for increasing the intensity and comprehensiveness of mentoring services includes the development of broader professional networks for graduate students. Within these networks, students are encouraged to seek support and guidance from multiple mentors rather than from solely one faculty adviser. For example, African American students who successfully completed social science doctoral programs often reported access to more than one mentor in graduate school (Dixon-Reeves, 2003). These mentors may assume a variety of roles, including that of a sponsor (i.e. individual who provides access to professional networks and career opportunities), a role model (i.e. individual who models professional behaviors), an adviser (i.e. individual who provides guidance on program requirements), or a coach (i.e. individual who provides emotional support and guidance on career trajectories; Dixon-Reeves, 2003). Within graduate programs, students also may seek clinical mentors, research mentors, and career development mentors (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008). Outside of training programs, international and national organizations (e.g. the Association of Black Psychologists and the National Association of School Psychologists in the US) offer opportunities for secondary and tertiary mentorship of minority graduate students. Collectively, these professional networks may confer a number of benefits for graduate students; however, primary reliance on external mentors (in the absence of robust support from program mentors) may foster feelings of disengagement from graduate training programs (Johnson, 2002; Thomas, 1993).

Especially for international students, other types of individualized interventions, such as one-to-one counseling supports, may be valuable for mitigating acculturative, academic, and social stress. International graduate students frequently report a range of mental health problems, including anxiety about academic performance and career-related decisions, depression, and difficulties with peer, professional, and romantic relationships (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007; Mori, 2000; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). Currently, research on university-based mental health supports and outcomes for international students is limited. However, some research has offered guidance on providing culturally-responsive mental health services to graduate students from international backgrounds. For example, this research has indicated that a variety of resiliency characteristics, such as high levels of self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy, are negatively correlated with language, social, academic, and personal adjustment problems among international graduate students (Wang, 2009). While counseling services should be tailored based on the individual's goals, preferences, and acculturative style, interventions centered on building a strong sense of self-efficacy, managing stress, identifying comfortable and effective communication techniques, and developing personal and professional goals may be especially valuable (Mori, 2000; Wang, 2009). Moreover, service providers should assume a developmental rather than pathological approach to identifying and addressing the mental health needs of international students. Specifically, mental health professionals should recognize the unique strengths, knowledge, and skills of the individual and conceptualize presenting difficulties

as a lack of learned skills rather than as indicators of underlying pathology (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Assessment in MTSS

In MTSS, assessment practices serve a number of purposes. For example, assessment data may indicate the overall achievement of students program-wide as well as the progress of individual students. At the graduate level, assessment data provide valuable information for both faculty and students. For faculty, formative and summative assessment data may be used to make decisions about curriculum and program policies, provide feedback to students, and report outcomes to internal and external bodies (e.g. home institution and accrediting organizations). Students may use assessment data to gauge their academic progress and to identify areas of strength and need.

With respect to evaluating student achievement, program faculty can use a variety of indicators. For example, they may wish to examine a student's overall grade point average (GPA), progress toward degree milestones (e.g. completion of proposal defense), and performance evaluations from faculty and field supervisors. Multisource feedback systems, which involve the integration of evaluations completed by multiple individuals (e.g. self, faculty, and supervisors) to assess professional competencies, may be especially informative for both faculty and graduate students (Andrews & Violato, 2010; Bole Williams & Williams Monahan, 2014).

In addition to evaluating student progress, school psychology faculty should periodically evaluate the climate of their respective graduate programs in order to ascertain whether students from diverse backgrounds feel respected and engaged. For example, various tools have been developed to gauge postsecondary students' feelings of belongingness in their respective programs as well as the extent to which academic environments are perceived as welcoming of cultural diversity (e.g. Ducker & Tori, 2001; Tori & Ducker, 2004). Additionally, several instruments for evaluating the content of multicultural curricula have been developed (e.g. Bluestone, Stokes, & Kuba, 1996). While many of these instruments require further scrutiny and validation, they hold promise for assessing the dynamics of graduate school settings. Moreover, faculty may wish to conduct student focus groups to obtain feedback about training opportunities, recruitment efforts, and satisfaction with program supports (Elkins Nesheim, Guentzel, Gansemer-Topf, Ewing Ross, & Turrentine, 2006). In coordinating these focus groups, faculty should recruit student participants with a range of backgrounds and training experiences as well as secure any necessary institutional approval or support for their initiatives.

Elkins Neisheim et al. (2006) described a number of important considerations for assessing the needs and experiences of graduate students. For example, gaining access to graduate students may be challenging at times, given the rigorous demands of their course and work schedules. Faculty should recognize that graduate students may be hesitant to participate in evaluation activities, depending on their satisfaction with the program, existing relationships with faculty, and

perceptions of program dynamics. Moreover, it is imperative that faculty evaluate the appropriateness of using various instruments to assess the needs of diverse populations in different settings. Finally, faculty should appropriately acknowledge the limitations of their evaluation methods and proceed cautiously when recommending program changes based on assessment findings.

Limitations and directions for future research

As described above, a growing body of research has investigated practices for recruiting and supporting a diverse student body in graduate psychology programs; however, there are a number of limitations to this literature. First and foremost, much of the research investigating the needs and training experiences of students from REL underrepresented backgrounds has focused on US training programs only. This research may provide a foundation for school psychology programs internationally; however, there is a critical need for research examining recruitment and retention strategies that are applicable specifically to school psychology programs in various parts of the world. In particular, research addressing the following areas may be especially valuable: a) factors that contribute to program selection among prospective students from REL underrepresented backgrounds (including minority and international students); b) the academic, social, and emotional experiences and needs of students from underrepresented backgrounds who are currently enrolled in training programs; c) strategies for building graduate training environments that are supportive of the academic and social success of all students; and d) effective practices for developing students' multicultural competencies. Additionally, much of the research reviewed above pertains to practices implemented in a wide variety of applied psychology and mental health graduate programs (e.g. counseling and clinical psychology programs), and most studies examined outcomes in programs that used multiple strategies simultaneously. Further research is needed to identify the most effective research-based strategies for recruiting and supporting individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in school psychology programs specifically. In particular, this research may examine a variety of student outcomes (e.g. academic and psychosocial outcomes) associated with the implementation of a multilevel framework for recruitment and retention practices, such as the one outlined above.

In summary, the lack of culturally diversity among school psychologists has been recognized as a longstanding obstacle in the field that will continue to be problematic unless faculty and institutions are proactive in their recruitment efforts. Ultimately, it is incumbent on graduate educators and their respective institutions to ensure that learning environments are supportive and welcoming of all students. Implementation of the strategies described above within a multilevel framework may assist faculty in addressing these issues in a more systematic and intentional manner. Moving forward, further research is needed to expand upon existing practices such that faculty in school psychology programs are well-prepared to support diverse student bodies.

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