Approved by APA Council of Representatives February 2014

Principles for the Recognition of Proficiencies in Professional Psychology[1]

Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies
in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP)

In order to educate and protect the public, the profession has the responsibility to exercise authority over the process of proficiency recognition. The American Psychological Association and its Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP) will consider petitions for formal recognition of a proficiency. Petitions that are approved by CRSPPP will be reviewed and acted upon by the APA Council of Representatives. CRSPPP will review the status of each recognized proficiency at least every seven years and recommend whether the proficiency should continue to be recognized.

Through a review of documents and discussions about proficiencies in psychology, it has become apparent that psychologists view proficiencies from a variety of perspectives. The "universe" of proficiencies could extend from a potentially unmanageable series of individual "micro" skills to considerably more organized and complex "near specialties" depending on how a specific array of knowledge and skills is defined. Any set of principles governing the recognition of proficiencies must be clear in its definition.

For purposes of this endeavor, the following definition of a proficiency is adopted:

> A proficiency is a circumscribed activity in the general practice of professional psychology or one or more of its specialties that is represented by a distinct procedure, technique, or applied skill set used in psychological assessment, treatment and/or intervention within which one develops competence.

A proficiency is distinguished from a specialty, which is a defined area of professional psychology practice characterized by a distinctive configuration of competent services for specified problems and populations. Practice in a specialty requires advanced knowledge and skills acquired through an organized sequence of education and training. For those training in health service psychology areas this is in addition to the broad and general education and core scientific and professional foundations acquired through an APA or CPA accredited doctoral program or programs accredited by an accrediting body that is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education for the accreditation of professional psychology education and training in preparation for entry to practice. Specialty training may be acquired either at the doctoral or postdoctoral level as defined by the specialty.in psychology.

Proficiencies can only be acquired through appropriate education and training focused quite specifically and intensively on defined content. Specialties may include several such proficiencies. While some proficiencies may be unique to only one specialty, others may be shared across specialties or practiced

[1]These principles are aimed at those areas of practice in psychology which have a history of primarily providing services to the public. Other areas, traditionally identified with the academic and scientific aspects of psychology, are not addressed.

generally. In order to educate and protect the public, the profession has the responsibility to exercise authority over the process of proficiency recognition. The process cannot be abdicated solely to market forces or to pressures brought by external bodies. Nothing in this document precludes a provider of psychological services from using the methods or dealing with the populations of any proficiency, so long as they do so "within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience" (APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, 2002).

Organization(s) responsible for the proficiency will define how the proficiency meets public need and how practitioners acquire the psychological knowledge and skills that represent the bases for its practice. In addition, organization(s) that are responsible for the organized development of the proficiency are responsible for collaborating with other organizations to ensure that appropriate education and training is provided in a sequential and integrated nature. When education and training in a proficiency can be achieved through interdisciplinary study, organization(s) responsible for the proficiency will describe how the proficiency meets the criteria within the context of interdisciplinary education and training.

RECOGNITION PRINCIPLES

Formal recognition of proficiencies in psychology begins with the submission of a petition to the American Psychological Association seeking recognition of the proposed proficiency.

The following general principles are used to evaluate any petition for recognition of a proficiency in professional psychology:

Criterion I. Administrative Organizations. The proposed proficiency is represented by one or more organizations that provide systems and structures that are sufficient to support the organized development of the proficiency, in terms of effectiveness, quality improvement, and provider identification and evaluation.

> Commentary: In order to ensure the management of the proficiency, having the resources of national organization(s) willing to assume responsibility is important, so that psychology's scientific and professional integrity can be preserved. These organizations meet regularly to review and describe the proficiency and appropriate policies for education and training in the proficiency.

Criterion II. Public Need for Proficiency Practice. The services of a proficiency are responsive to identifiable public needs.

> Commentary: Proficiencies may evolve from the profession's recognition that there is a particular public need. Proficiencies may also develop from advances in scientific psychology from which applications to serve the public may be derived.

Criterion III. Diversity. The organization(s) responsible for the proficiency demonstrates recognition of the importance of cultural and individual differences and diversity in education and training in the proficiency.

> Commentary: The proficiency provides trainees with relevant knowledge and experiences about the role of cultural and individual differences and diversity in psychological phenomena as it relates to the science and practice of the proficiency in each of the following areas: i) development of a proficiency-specific scientific and theoretical knowledge; ii) preparation for practice; iii) education and training; iv) continuing education and professional development; and v) evaluation of effectiveness.

Criterion IV Distinctiveness. A proficiency is represented by a distinct procedure, technique, or applied skill set used in psychological assessment and/or treatment within which one develops competence.

> Commentary: A proficiency typically reflects the development of a competence in a circumscribed activity beyond broad and general doctoral training. While it is recognized that there may be overlap among the knowledge and skill bases of various psychological applications (i.e. procedure, technique, or applied skill set), the proficiency does not overlap completely with any other psychological applications.

Criterion V. Parameters of Practice. A proficiency may be described by a circumscribed set of activities that may be applied to specific populations, settings, or biopsychosocial problems.

> Commentary: This parameter consists of the descriptions of specific procedures and techniques

utilized in the proficiency and to the populations to which they apply. This includes assessment techniques, intervention strategies, consultative methods, diagnostic procedures, ecological strategies, and applications from the psychological laboratory to serve a public need for psychological assistance.

Criterion VI. Initial Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills. A proficiency is acquired through a defined program of study and training that enables psychologists to develop the necessary competence to use this proficiency.

Commentary: Education and training in a proficiency may occur at the doctoral or postdoctoral level or through an organized continuing education program. Irrespective of when it is offered, education and training in a proficiency is of a sequential, integrated nature with organized oversight of didactic and appropriate supervised experience related to the knowledge base and skill sets distinctive to the proficiency. Background of relevant competencies of faculty/instructors are described as well as learner evaluation procedures. In addition, there are organizational mechanisms in place that provide oversight and coordination of the education and training in the proficiency. When education and training in a proficiency is achieved through interdisciplinary study, organization(s) responsible for the proficiency will describe how the proficiency meets the criteria within the context of interdisciplinary education and training. If the proficiency is interdisciplinary be sure to highlight the training component that is specifically relevant to psychologists.

Criterion VII. Maintenance of Competence. The organization(s) seeking recognition for the proficiency is responsible for identifying or providing its practitioners with regularly scheduled opportunities for continuing professional development in the proficiency practice and assessing knowledge and skills.

Commentary: This criterion requires that petitioners articulate what continuing education may be necessary to maintain competency in the proficiency, particularly given the rapidly increasing and ever changing research and information related to the proficiency. The petition should specify which mechanisms are used to achieve these goals.

Criterion VIII. Effectiveness. A proficiency demonstrates the effectiveness of the distinct procedure(s), technique(s), or applied skill set(s) that comprise the proficiency with evidence consistent with the APA 2005 Policy on Evidence-based Practice.

Commentary: A body of evidence is to be presented that demonstrates the effectiveness of the proficiency with appropriate problems and populations and documents the best available research.

Criterion IX. Quality Improvement. A proficiency promotes ongoing investigations and procedures to develop further the quality and utility of its applications.

Commentary: The public interest requires the best services possible for consumers. A proficiency, therefore, continues to seek ways to improve the quality and usefulness of its practitioners' services beyond its original determination of effectiveness. Such investigations may take many forms. Petitions describe how the research and practice literatures are regularly reviewed for developments which are relevant to the proficiency's skills and services, and how this information is publicly disseminated.

Criterion X. Guidelines for Proficiency Service Delivery. The proficiency has developed and disseminated guidelines for practice in the proficiency that expand on the profession's general practice guidelines and ethical principles.[2]

> Commentary: Such guidelines are readily available to proficiency practitioners and to members of the public and describe the characteristic ways in which proficiency practitioners make decisions about proficiency services and about how such services are delivered to the public.

Criterion XI. Provider Identification and Evaluation. The administrative organization(s) responsible for the proficiency has sound methods for evaluating competence in the proficiency and recognizing practitioners who have achieved competency.

> Commentary: Identifying psychologists who are competent to practice the proficiency provides a significant service to the public. Assessing the knowledge and skill levels of these professionals helps increase the ability to improve the quality of services provided. Initially practitioners competent to practice in the proficiency may simply be identified by their successful completion of an organized sequence of education and training. As the proficiency matures it is expected that the proficiency will develop more formal structures for the recognition of competency in practitioners.

[2]In this context, professional proficiency guidelines refer to modes of conceptualization, identification and assessment of issues, and intervention planning and execution common to those trained and experienced in the practice of the proficiency. Such professional guidelines may be found in documents or websites including, but not limited to, those bearing such a title or as described in a variety of published textbooks, chapters, and/or articles focused on such contents.