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Statement of the APA Board of Directors on the Internship Imbalance Problem

Growing internship imbalance needs urgent attention; APA is working with other psychology groups to address the issue

2009 internship match day saw almost one in four psychology graduate students seeking an internship fail to match to an available position during the initial matching phase administered by the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC). During this year's match process 2,752 applicants matched to an internship position; 846 applicants were not matched. While the APA Board is confident that some of these unmatched students will be able to find internships through the clearinghouse process (299 slots were not filled during the match process) the fact that a larger and larger proportion of students seeking internship are not matching to slots on match day is a growing and serious concern. Of even more serious concern is the reality that the number of students seeking internship is greater than the number of available accredited internship positions thus forcing some students to complete their internship requirement in a non-APA accredited internship and as a result possibly limiting their future career options.

The current imbalance between students who need an internship to fulfill their degree requirements and the number of available accredited internships position is unacceptably high and presents a burden on those students who fail to acquire an internship during the match or clearinghouse process. Those students who fail to match find themselves at a crisis point in their efforts to complete their professional training and pursue a psychology career. The lack of a sufficient number of accredited internship positions will also present a critical challenge for the future of the profession if it has the effect of discouraging students from psychology as a career choice or steers them toward unaccredited internship positions.

Steps the Education Community is Pursuing in an Effort to Address the Imbalance Problem

Although this year's proportion of students who did not match has been exacerbated by the current economic downturn, the problem of an imbalance between the number of students seeking an internship and the number of available internship positions has been a serious issue for a number of years, i.e. the number of internship applicants has grown at a faster rate than the number of new internship positions. For example, the number of internships available in 2009 was seven *fewer* than was available in 2008. However between 2007 and 2008 the number of internship positions *grew* by 243; in other words, there were the beginnings of a growth pattern in the number of internships that the current economic conditions has reversed; the hope is temporarily.

In response, APA through its Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) and the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) has taken a number of actions, including maintaining close communication with the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) and the five training councils representing the different areas of doctoral education and training in professional psychology. APA has two critical concerns: making sure that there are sufficient internship positions for every qualified student and that those internships meet quality training standards.

Truth in Advertising/Better Educate Potential Students – APA requests and publishes programs' internship placement rates in *Graduate Study in Psychology*, the largest compendium of information about graduate education in psychology. In addition, those programs that are APA accredited are required to make publicly available their internship placement information on their website. APA, along with the other education and training organizations remains committed to disseminating information to potential students regarding career paths in psychology.

Workforce Analysis – In 2006, the APA Council of Representatives authorized the establishment of a psychology workforce analysis capacity. In addition to conducting environmental scans, psychology needs more and better data on the number of psychologists currently working in particular service delivery sub-fields of the discipline and the number of psychologists needed to meet consumer needs in those areas. Although these efforts are still

gearing up, they will be fundamental in providing useful information to psychology's education and training community as well as policymakers.

Federal Advocacy for Funding for Education and Training. APA continues to work for increased funding for psychology education and training programs and student support. In 2002 APA was instrumental in establishing the Graduate Psychology Education program in the Bureau of Health Professions, the only federal program solely dedicated to the education and training of psychologists, including internship programs. All members of the psychology community should lend their voice to efforts to advocate for increasing federal funding for education and training in professional psychology and educate policy makers about the need for psychologists to meet health needs in currently underserved communities.

Other pathways promoted by the education and training community include steps which, when taken together, represent actions that could lead to improvement in the imbalance issue:

Innovation – The field needs to identify and share new and innovative ways to create and fund additional internship positions in accredited programs.

Assist New Programs/Support Program Growth – Develop tools that will help start-up internship programs become accredited or existing accredited internship programs grow.

Changes in Match Program – APPIC is in the process of exploring a proposal that would allow only students from APA accredited programs to participate in the match program. While APA is not a part of this decision-making process, APPIC's decision will impact the match imbalance issue.

Department Responsibility – Individual graduate departments should assume more responsibility for their student match rates. One proposal currently being studied is a plan by which departments with match rates lower than some agreed upon percentage would have the responsibility to either find or create internships for any unplaced students or reduce their future enrollment by that number.

Advice to students

Before selecting a graduate department, be sure to obtain its internship placement rates through *Graduate Study in Psychology*, the program's website, or the APPIC website on match statistics. Also inquire about programs the department has in place to mentor students through the internship match process. For many students information about a program's match statistics comes too late, as the student is approaching internship, to help them make an informed decision. Students *applying* to graduate school need to ask about match rates before selecting a program.

Students will greatly increase their chances of being placed on match day if they remain open to placements at internship sites across the country. Be as flexible as possible in your planning. Also be sure to apply to programs that reflect your training interests, allow ample time to write and edit your essays, be sure your curriculum vitae reflects your experiences well, and practice your interviewing skills.

The problem of too few accredited internship opportunities was not created in a short time and it will, unfortunately for today's cadre of students, not be resolved in a short time; but it must be addressed. APA is committed to working with other leaders within the field and graduate departments themselves to address problems and will continue to communicate with students and departments in an effort to collaborate. Doctoral departments must also assume greater responsibility for ensuring that the students they accept will be able to complete their professional training.

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