



## Introduction

The field of school psychology is facing a shortage of practitioners and graduate programs nationwide (NASP, 2021). Puerto Rico has three master's programs and one doctoral program in school psychology. The ratio of students to school psychologists in Puerto Rico is greater than 1:2,000. There is evidence that Puerto Rico needs more school psychologists and graduate training programs. This presentation aims to provide insight into the barriers and outcomes of the efforts made by the doctoral program in school psychology at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. This doctoral program intends to contribute to the expansion of the field of school psychology in Puerto Rico by recruiting and retaining linguistically and culturally diverse students. The lack of knowledge of the specialty, the COVID-19 pandemic, and sociopolitical factors pose challenges to recruitment efforts. These factors have led the graduate program to identify various recruitment and retention strategies.

## Program Background

The Graduate Program in School Psychology at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) offers a Doctor of Philosophy in School Psychology degree and an optional Master of Science degree in School Psychology. It is the only graduate program in school psychology in the UPR system. Beginning in August 2020, the Program's vision of training and practice in school psychology is based on the APA (American Psychological Association) and NASP (National Association of School Psychology) accreditation standards. Creating the Program followed regulations and procedures established in UPR's academic and administrative certifications. The timeline to develop the Program was as follows:

- Approved by the Department of Social Sciences, December 2008
- Approved by the Curricular Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, May 2015
- Approved by the College of Arts and Sciences, November 10th, 2015
- Approved by the UPR-M Academic Senate (Certification 17-35), June 2017
- Approved by UPR-M Administrative Board (Certification 18-19-285), March 2019
- Approved by the UPR Governing Board (Certification 113-2018-2019), June 2019
- Approved by the PR Council of Higher Education, February 2020
- The Program admitted its first class in August 2020

## Outcomes

**Table 1**

*Student Admission and Attrition*

Cohort	Admitted		Attrition
	Male	Female	
2020	1	6	0
2021	1	6	2
2022	3	6	0
Total	5	18	2

**Table 2**

*Faculty Demographics*

Sex		Degrees	
Male	Female	PhD	EdD
4	8	11*	1

Note. There are 4 faculty members with a degree in School Psychology

## Barriers cont.

**Licensure:** The licensure process is another barrier to the developing school psychology field in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rico Psychological Examination Board provides a general licensing and does not recognize specialties for practice except for clinical psychology. Therefore, psychologists with degrees other than school psychology may perform roles and functions inherent to the profession. Currently, only one examination is available for both masters and doctoral levels, and they go through the same licensing process.

**Accreditation:** As a new program, several barriers are presented. The program is not currently accredited by NASP or APA as the program is currently on its 3rd year. Although the program is on its path to accreditation, it is well known that students and faculty seek graduate programs that are fully accredited.

## Barriers

**Shortage:** As stated by Barret et al. (2020), the field of school psychology presents not only a lack of practitioners but also a shortage of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in the profession. School psychology is a growing field in Puerto Rico. One of the main challenges faced by school psychology on the Island is the limited knowledge that others have of the area. This lack of knowledge becomes evident with the need for more school psychologists in Puerto Rico. The number of graduate programs is insufficient to supply the demand for school psychologists. Thus, psychologists from other areas work in school contexts performing the roles and functions of school psychologists. It was until 2020 that the PR Department of Education hired psychologists to work in the schools.

**Recruitment:** One includes promoting the program and recruiting students and faculty. The program has faced challenges regarding recruiting students and faculty members. As a new program in Puerto Rico, many do not know of its existence, and additional efforts are needed to promote it. As mentioned before, there is a need for more school psychologists, which impacts the recruitment of faculty members for the program.

## Strategies

**Current strategies:** Current efforts to increase recruitment, retention, and knowledge of the field and program include 1) Participation in various in-person and online open houses on campus and at other universities in Puerto Rico. 2) Email thread through the UPR communication system. 3) Online communication with other universities in the mainland USA. 4) Presentations about the program with student organizations and courses. 5) Integration of school psychology and the graduate program within undergraduate courses.

**Future strategies:** As the program moves forward, an examination of strategies has been made, and some future strategies are outlined. 1) Incorporate the NASP Exposure Project (NASP-EP) within undergraduate programs in Puerto Rico to increase knowledge of the field and our graduate program. 2) Expand recruitment efforts to other countries to include other Latin American countries and the Caribbean. 3) Identify additional financial strategies to support better students enrolled in the program.