

The School Psychology Admissions Resources Survey (SPARS): What sources of information influence graduate student program selection?



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Abstract

Understanding what sources of information are utilized by prospective students may help school psychology programs tailor their recruitment and retention efforts to match student preferences and needs. A researcher-made questionnaire was created based on previous research examining program choice. The School Psychology Admissions Resources Survey (SPARS) includes 21 items examining the importance of different information sources prospective students might use to decide on a graduate program to attend. Demographic items, questions related to participants' application history, and two qualitative feedback items were also included in the questionnaire. After two rounds of pilot dissemination, the final questionnaire was sent via email to program directors of all school psychology programs found on the NASP website with a request to forward to all students in the program. Results from the 425 students who completed the questionnaire will provide information on what sources of information are important to students when selecting a program.

Introduction

- There is currently a shortage of school psychology practitioners and faculty; this shortage is projected to continue through 2025 (Castillo et al., 2014).
- Available resources (e.g., program handbook, social media accounts, information on graduate rates) affect a students' decision-making process and ultimately choice of graduate school (Dam, 2014; Poock & Love, 2001; Talbot et al., 1996).
- Students are exposed to school psychology in many ways, such as direct contact with individuals in the field or graduate program and NASP websites (Bocanegra et al., 2017).
- Although researchers have examined why students go into the field of school psychology, there is limited information on what available resources assisted in the choice of a specific graduate program.

Methods

Procedure

- A researcher-made survey was created by combining items from previous studies examining program choice (e.g., Dam, 2014; Poock & Love, 2001; Talbot et al., 1996).
- The School Psychology Admissions Resources Survey (SPARS) consists of 21 items
- Participants were also asked about demographic information, application information, and qualitative questions of why they chose a particular program and suggestions for program recruitment and admissions
- The survey was reviewed and updated based on expert feedback and an Exploratory Factor Analysis from a pilot dissemination to two graduate schools
- The final survey was sent via email to program directors of all school psychology programs found on the NASP website directory; a request was made to forward to all current students (Aspiranti et al., 2021).

Demographics

- Same general demographics as Aspiranti et al. (2021)
- 425 students completed the survey; 87% were female
- 77% were aged 18-29, 18% aged 30-39, and 5% aged 40+
- 74% were White, 7% Black, 11% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% American Indian/Alaskan, and 3% Other
- 70% were in-state residents
- 17% had parents with high school as highest level of education, while 12% had a parent with a doctoral degree
- 8% had parent household income of less than \$30,000, while 42% had parent household income of more than \$100,000
- Mean GPA was between 3.5 and 3.75
- 77% had an undergraduate psychology degree
- 57% were seeking a specialist-level degree
- 37% receive some type of financial support through their university

SPARS Item	Means	St. Dev
Program Handbook	1.76	1.39
Sample Program of Study	1.89	1.44
Full-Time Faculty	2.18	1.42
Adjunct/Affiliate Faculty	1.50	1.36
Housing	1.02	1.26
Graduation Rates	2.45	1.37
Commitment to Diversity	2.04	1.38
Program Social Media	0.89	1.18
Program Mission Statement	1.86	1.32
Department/College Website	2.74	1.21
General Institution Website	2.54	1.26
Program Information Website	2.89	1.17
Contact with Current Students	1.72	1.54
Contact with Program Director	2.05	1.52

Results

SPARS Item (cont'd)	Means	St. Dev
List of Faculty Accomplishments	1.71	1.32
Informational Event Held on Campus	1.42	1.49
Link to Application on Website	2.47	1.41
Printed Sources of Information	0.82	1.15
Information on Jobs after Graduation	2.40	1.40
Campus Visit (arranged by program)	1.92	1.58
Graduates' Dissertation Topics	0.94	1.16

- Four factors were identified through an exploratory factor analysis—Program details (6 items), website information (8 items), other sources (5 items), physical structures (2 items)

Factor Differences	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Program Details—Website Info	18.36	406	0.00
Program Details—Other Sources	-6.40	405	0.00
Program Details—Physical Structure	-3.33	406	0.00
Website Info—Other Sources	-24.26	405	0.00
Website Info—Physical Structure	-16.19	406	0.00
Other Sources—Campus Info	1.69	405	0.92

- All differences between factors (except Other Sources and Campus Info) were significant; greater t-scores were found for Website Info

Implications

- Website information was much more important than any other factor, including social media or personal contacts
- There were no significant differences based upon a students' demographic background.
- Presently, websites appear to be the most commonly used method of communicating with students who enroll in school psychology programs. However, the study does not present data of students who did NOT enroll in school psychology programs. The sample, which is largely white students with parents who have college degrees clearly does not represent the population of students who may be effective school psychologists, but who do not receive information about the field or the program.