

# Integrating Equity and Social Justice throughout a Graduate Program

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## Abstract

Diversity and being responsive within the changing schools' demographics should be our priority. Our institution and community have limited diversity, and we were challenged by NASP through the program review process to move beyond these limitations. We began with infusing content into stand-alone courses, one-time trainings, and field experiences but have come to recognize these intensive experiences are necessary, but not sufficient. We are committed to integrating equity and social justice throughout our program. We will describe how we have reviewed and revised most program materials and updated our course outlines, readings, and assignments to infuse diversity into what we do on a daily basis. We have come a long way and continue to reflect and seek out and use feedback from others. Through our poster, we will share ideas and continue to prepare the next generation of culturally responsive and humble school psychologists.

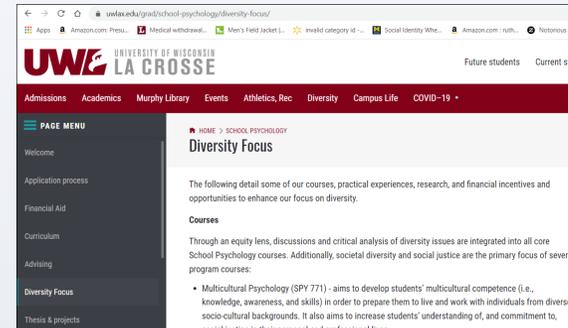
## Literature Review

- Among the objectives associated with the Social Justice Goal within NASP's current Strategic Plan is to "expand school psychologists' skills in promoting equity and implementing nondiscriminatory practices." (NASP, 2017, p.7)
- The 2020 Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists call for programs to use "systematic and comprehensive processes" to ensure school psychology candidates are developing these skills. (NASP, 2020)
- Miranda et al. (2014) found that integrating an equity and social justice lens throughout a program is necessary for candidates to develop these skills.
- Experts highlight that programs need to prepare candidates to demonstrate these skills at both the individual (e.g., responding to microaggressions) and systems (e.g., addressing school policies) levels (Williams et al., 2021).

## Purpose

Feedback from a previous 2006 program review suggested that our university, a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in a predominantly White city and region of the state, should identify ways to ensure our graduate students have increased experiences with diverse student populations. This feedback contributed to the program revising its mission statement and webpage as illustrated above and to the right and to increased emphasis on the stand-alone immersive courses and experiences described under the first strategy listed. We have since recognized that these changes were not enough. This poster highlights other strategies we have begun to implement to integrate equity and social justice throughout our program.

**Excerpt from program mission statement:** ...*By employing an equity lens, grounded by examining their own biases and social justice, graduates are advocates for children, providers of behavioral and mental health care, specialists in the assessment of children, psychoeducational consultants who use effective problem-solving strategies, and experts in the design and delivery of effective psychological and educational interventions at the individual, family, and systems levels....*



## Strategies

### 1. Include both stand-alone courses/immersive experiences AND integrated discussion throughout program

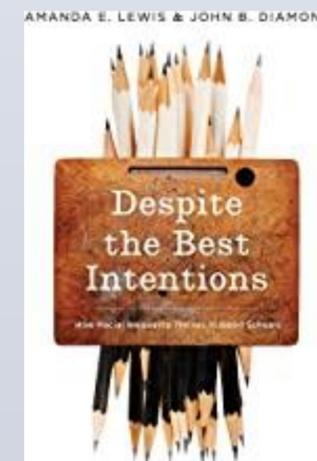
- Stand-alone courses and immersive experiences
  - ✓ New *Multicultural Psychology* course addressing the development of cultural humility taught by a counseling psychologist who specializes in racial identity, religious identity, and multicultural education.
  - ✓ Immersion field trips to larger, more diverse urban school districts in the region, including equity-related training and opportunities for graduate students to shadow district school psychologists. An optional opportunity is also offered to 2<sup>nd</sup> years to spend an additional week working with a school psychologist in this same urban district.
- The three additional strategies described below highlight how equity and social justice is also integrated throughout our program

### 2. Frontload equity discussions so students can develop and apply as lens for future learning

- Within the program sequence: e.g., The new *Multicultural Psychology* is taught early in the program sequence, in the spring of students' first year.
- Within individual courses and texts: e.g., In the *School Psychology: Role and Function* course also taught during students' first year, an equity lens is introduced early on in the course and students are prompted to read "Social Justice Connections" boxed inserts found within each chapter of the course text before reading the rest of the chapter.

### 3. Focus on systemic issues AND application of practical tools to individual cases

- Systemic issues: e.g., Special education and disciplinary disproportionality are discussed in several courses, including two also taught during the first year: Assessment of Personality and EBD and Schoolwide Practice in MTSS. In the second of these two courses, students read and critically discuss *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*, including especially concepts related to "opportunity hoarding" by white parents in a diverse school and differential implementation of discipline policies and practices along racial lines.
- Critical analysis and application of tools to individual cases:
  - ✓ e.g., Culturally Responsive-Problem-Solving Model (Newell, 2020)
  - ✓ e.g., Cultural-Linguistic Interpretive Matrix (C-LIM) (Flanagan, Ortiz and Alonso, 2013)



### 4. Elevate and amplify minoritized voices

- We continue to work on decolonizing syllabi and courses
  - ✓ e.g., by adding readings by colleagues of color and
  - ✓ e.g., inviting colleagues of color to interact with students within courses, observe and provide feedback on courses or other program materials

## Conclusions

While we are proud to share the progress we have made in attempting to integrate equity and social justice throughout our program to date, we recognize that we are still a work in progress. Initial informal feedback we have received from students and school districts where our students complete internships seem to indicate that we are on the right track. School districts report that our students come to them with a strong foundation in equity and social justice. Next steps we are considering to build on the work we have already done include:

- More formally surveying students and school districts and other stakeholders regarding their needs and stretching our teaching to meet those needs
- Consulting with university diversity and inclusion offices to help promote recruiting efforts through the program website and link students to campus support systems to help them feel connected and improve retention.
- Integrating increased discussion of intersectionality into our program courses and experiences as well.

## Selected References/Resources

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