Commissioned Article

Research productivity and scholarly impact of APA-accredited school psychology programs: 2005–2009 ☆

John H. Kranzler *, Sally L. Grapin, Matt L. Daley

University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study examined the research productivity and scholarly impact of faculty in APA-accredited school psychology programs using data in the PsycINFO database from 2005 to 2009. We ranked doctoral programs on the basis of authorship credit, number of publications, and number of citations. In addition, we examined the primary publication outlets of school psychology program faculties and the major themes of research during this time period. We compared our results with those of a similar study that examined data from a decade earlier. Limitations and implications of this study are also discussed.

Published by Elsevier Ltd. on behalf of Society for the Study of School Psychology.

1. Introduction

National rankings of doctoral training programs by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Research Council (NRC), and the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) are valuable in that they provide an indication of a graduate program's performance in comparison to its peers across the country. As stated by the NRC, it is "critical that we, as a society, be able to compare doctoral programs, assess their quality, and provide information about these programs for doctoral students choosing programs, for faculty responsible for developing them, and for administrators charged with making wise investments" (p. 1, National Research Council, 2003). Unfortunately, none of these national organizations ranks doctoral programs in school psychology.

National rankings of doctoral programs in school psychology, however, have been conducted by two periodicals: *US News & World Report* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. As part of its annual ranking of the best graduate schools, *US News & World Report* also ranks doctoral programs in a number of disciplines. Although they use a weighted composite of various "objective" factors (i.e., academic reputation, student selectivity, faculty resources, and research activity) to rank graduate schools, doctoral program rankings are based exclusively on the results of a reputational survey completed by academic deans. Respondents are asked to nominate up to 10 programs in each specialty area. Doctoral program rankings are based on the number of nominations received by each program. The most recent ranking of doctoral programs in school psychology by *US News & World Report* was published in 1995.

The use of reputational surveys to rank doctoral programs has been widely criticized as overly subjective and susceptible to bias (for a review, see Brooks, 2005). In reputational surveys, raters are asked to assess overall quality on the basis of their personal knowledge of programs, despite the fact that they may be largely unfamiliar with many of the programs they are asked to evaluate (e.g., Dometrius, Hood, Shirkey, & Kidd, 1988). In the absence of program-specific knowledge, ratings may be based on one's perception of the quality of the institution as a whole, rather than specific information pertaining to its doctoral program (e.g., Diamond & Graham, 2000). Another criticism of reputational surveys is that program reputations seem to have "staying power." In other words, the reputation of programs tends to remain fairly stable over time despite changes to the program or turnover in faculty (e.g., Webster, 1981). In addition to these concerns, given that the most recent ranking by *US News & World Report* was published over 15 years ago, the generalizability of their rankings to contemporary doctoral programs in school psychology is questionable.

The most recent national ranking of doctoral programs in school psychology was published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2007. They based their rankings on the results of a completely quantitative analysis of faculty research productivity. To rank programs, they created a "faculty scholarly productivity index" that consisted of a weighted composite of the number of books published in 2002–2006, journal articles published in 2004–2006, and journal citations in 2003–2006 per program. They also included the percentage of program faculty with a book publication, journal publication, and journal publication cited by another work.

Although the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* use of empirical evidence to rank doctoral programs is an improvement over the use of reputational surveys, their rankings are highly suspect due to errors in the identification of faculty affiliated with school psychology programs. They identified program faculty solely from university websites, which can be out-of-date or incomplete, apparently without verification from all institutions. As a result, the number of core faculty listed for several ranked programs is incorrect. The most egregious example is the University of Memphis (UM). Ranked #4 overall, the UM school psychology program is listed as having 32 full-time faculty members. In actuality, they have three (R. Floyd, personal communication, June 14, 2010). Because the faculty productivity index included faculty who are not members of school psychology training programs, for at least some ranked programs, the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* national rankings are highly suspect.

Over the past 30 years, a number of investigations have been conducted on research in school psychology (e.g., Carper & Williams, 2004; Little, 1997; Little, Akin-Little, & Tingstrom, 2004; O'Callaghan, 1974; Reynolds & Clark, 1984; Roberts, Davis, Zanger, Gerrard-Morris, & Robinson, 2006; Webster, Hall, & Bolen, 1993). These studies have primarily focused on the identification of scholars who have published the most in major school psychology journals, their institutional affiliation, or trends in research topics. Two of these studies, however, ranked school psychology programs on the basis of faculty research productivity (Carper & Williams, 2004; Webster et al., 1993). Although the overall quality of training programs cannot be reflected by any single factor, first-rate doctoral programs, virtually by definition, are those with faculty members who are involved in "cutting-edge" research and whose scholarly contributions to the discipline are widely recognized.

In the first such study, Webster et al. (1993) ranked the top 50 institutions by total number of research publications between 1985 and 1991 in four major school psychology journals and one additional journal in a closely related area. The journals they examined were: *School Psychology Review*, *Journal of School Psychology*, *Psychology in the Schools*, *Professional School Psychology* (renamed *School Psychology Quarterly* in 1990), and the *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*. Webster et al. ranked institutions by total number of article publications (excluding editorial comments, test and book reviews, and letters to the editor) and by authorship credit.