

Alfred University school psychology doctoral program earns rare distinction

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ALFRED The Alfred University Division of Psychology doctoral program has been awarded full accreditation by the American Psychology Association (APA), a distinction achieved by only a small fraction of programs nationwide. Even more remarkable is that the program, only in existence since 1989, achieved full accreditation on its initial application. "Despite being located in one of the smallest universities in the country, we've attained a level of evaluation from the APA that is gained by only a small percentage of programs at much larger, well-known schools," commented Dr. Edward Gaughan, interim dean of the AU College of Engineering and Professional Studies. "This really brings us to the forefront of our field." Gaughan, who was chairman of the Division of School Psychology during the application process and helped spearhead the effort to gain APA accreditation, said the application process began with a "self study" of the School Psychology doctoral program in 1998. "The self-study lets us say 'Here's what we say we can do and here's how we've done it,'" Gaughan said. A review by an independent consultant and a visit by an independent on-site review team followed. The application for accreditation was submitted to the APA Committee on Accreditation in January 2000 and in May 2001, the University received word it had been awarded full accreditation, which lasts a period of seven years. The APA could have awarded the program partial accreditation or rejected the application entirely. Gaughan explained that very few institutions are awarded full accreditation, and fewer still receive that distinction on their very first application. "Less than 1 percent of applicant programs" obtain full accreditation, he said. "To obtain full accreditation on our first try is quite an achievement." Indeed, during the same accreditation cycle which included AU's application, schools such as George Washington University, Marquette University and the City University of New York (CUNY) were all awarded only partial (three-year) accreditation for doctoral training programs. Gaughan said with full accreditation will come a vastly improved ability to draw top students. "This puts us in a class of programs that will be attractive to the most high quality student applicants, the most sought after applicants," said Gaughan, who expects the number of applicants to the program to double in the next few years. "It also puts us in a much more competitive position when applying for external funds" such as from the federal government and private foundations. Grants the Division of School Psychology has received in recent years - three totaling more than \$2 million in the last three years - have provided new training opportunities for doctoral students, something that was a key factor in the Division attaining full accreditation. Another important factor was the employment graduates of the program have gained. Gaughan said 85 percent of the students who receive their doctorate in school psychology at AU secure jobs as full-time professional psychologists, primarily in public schools. The other 15 percent find work in various agencies that provide mental health care services or at institutions of higher learning. Gaughan said accreditation will increase employment opportunities for graduates of the program. "One of the reasons we sought accreditation is that it is becoming increasingly important for graduates (of school psychology doctoral programs) to come from APA accredited programs," he said. "The best internships, university faculty positions, doctoral fellowships, all look for graduates of an APA accredited institution. If you're from an APA accredited program, doors are open for you that are closed to others." Gaughan credits a host of people for helping in the University's successful accreditation application, including the administration and Board of Trustees, faculty members and current and graduated students.