

New Psy.D. to Fill Critical Need

WCU's doctorate in clinical psychology (Psy.D.) will launch this August with its first cohort of students. When the State System Board of Governors approved the program this past spring, "the very next day we got a half dozen calls from interested applicants," says WCU professor of psychology Vanessa Johnson, who was a key player in the program's development.

She wasn't surprised by the level of interest. There are few Psy.D. programs offered in the region and all of the existing programs are at pricier, private institutions. Couple that with the fact that there is an "absolutely critical need for psychologists here in Pennsylvania and throughout the U.S." says Johnson.



DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

WHY WCU?

- Provides citizens of the Commonwealth with a State System Psy.D. program in the eastern part of the state
- Leverages the success of the MA in Clinical Psychology with a current enrollment of 64 students

WHY NOW?

36% increase in related positions in the Dept. of Defense and Dept. of Veterans Affairs

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Child and Adolescent Health—current lack of specialists trained to work with adolescents
- Post Traumatic Stress—broadly defined, including military trauma, to serve individuals experiencing PTSD and major depression

21% growth in related occupations in the Commonwealth between 2010-2020



Presentation Slide on Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology to the Board of Governors

For example, almost one in five American adults had a mental illness last year, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a U.S. government agency. Yet nearly half of all counties nationwide currently have no working mental health professionals, reports *The Washington Post*.

Government agencies and private organizations are working to catch up with the demand with new or expanded mental health clinics, by integrating mental health services into primary care and

emergency settings, and other initiatives. Thus, employment for psychologists is expected to grow 19 percent in the 20-year period ending in 2024. Job prospects should be best for those who have a doctoral degree in an applied specialty.

WCU's new Psy.D. will offer two such specialties – trauma, and child and adolescent mental health, areas which have acute shortages of trained psychologists, says Angela T. Clarke, an associate professor and clinical psychology graduate coordinator for the department of psychology.

Like similar programs of its kind, WCU's Psy.D. includes a fulltime, semester-long internship. A Community Mental Health Clinic will open at WCU next June with the dual purpose of meeting community needs for affordable mental health care while enabling Psy.D. students to fulfill their internship requirement right on campus. Even students who choose to do their internship off site will be able to take part in shorter experiences at the clinic after they have completed one third of their coursework. All students will be supervised by experienced clinicians and the clinic director, who will be named before the start of fall semester.

"The clinic will offer a variety of mental health services, from individual and family counseling to assessments for emotional and behavioral disorders," says Clarke. "Fees will be on a sliding scale, based on the client's ability to pay."

The clinic, as well as the Psy.D. program, will be located on the 8th floor of Wayne Hall.

With the new Psy.D. coming on line, the department of psychology will phase out its master's of clinical psychology after the current cohort graduates.

"For students interested in a master's level education, there are other excellent programs on campus that are counseling focused, such as the master of science in clinical health counseling overseen by the department of counselor education," notes Johnson. "In the field of psychology, a doctorate like the Psy.D. degree offers the student the widest options for initial career opportunities and for later advancement."

Johnson and many others on campus, including Provost Laurie Bernotsky and Vice Provost Jeff Osgood, as well as retired Provost Linda Lamwers, worked long hours to see the new Psy.D. become a reality. Johnson beams as she describes the program being a "win win" for both faculty and students.

"The department of psychology has an extremely productive and talented faculty – productive not only in the classroom but by research standards. These faculty members now have an opportunity to exploit their talents more fully through this new program," she says. "And our Psy.D. students will be getting a quality education from a fantastic faculty at a very affordable price."

To learn more about WCU's doctorate in clinical psychology, contact Clarke at aclarke@wcupa.edu or 610-436-3136.

