

Most Frequent Reasons The ASPPB/National Register Designation Criteria Are Not Met

It may be helpful to programs applying for designation to be aware of the typical reasons why previous applicants have encountered difficulty with meeting the designation criteria. This is not a supplement to the Designation Criteria or a definitive or exhaustive set of decision guidelines. Rather, it reflects the thinking of previous committees on areas that often raise concerns and should serve in an advisory way to help new program applicants to perfect their designation applications.

Criterion 6: “The program must be an integrated, organized sequence of study”.

- Programs often list a set of courses; however, they do not document an integrated, organized sequence of study. This criterion is best met with a sample curriculum that sequentially lists courses students are expected to take during each semester and each year of their program.

Criterion 7a: “There must be an identifiable psychology faculty sufficient in size and breadth to carry out its responsibilities...”

- The percentage of time in the program for the core faculty and the teaching adjunct faculty should produce a reasonable student-faculty ratio. A ratio that is higher than 10:1 creates a concern, and if the ratio exceeds 15:1, there may be a real problem.
- If the size of the student body or distribution of the students across years in the program is too large for the number of faculty, the students will have a difficult time having adequate oversight by faculty members for such matters as academic advisement, dissertations, and practicum and internship experiences.
- A faculty consisting primarily of one sub-discipline of psychology (e.g., clinical psychology) generally does not have the breadth to cover a doctoral curriculum. This weakness is particularly apparent when the core courses in the substantive areas (e.g., research design and methodology, statistics, biological bases of behavior, cognitive-affective bases of behavior, social bases of behavior) are taught by a faculty member who did not have a specialty in the subject matter during graduate training or has not subsequently developed expertise in the area as evidenced by advanced attainments such as additional training or demonstrated scholarship.

Criterion 10: “...The core program shall require every student to demonstrate competence in each substantive area. This typically will be met through substantial instruction in each of these foundational areas, as demonstrated by a minimum of three graduate semester hours, five or more graduate quarter hours (when an academic term is other than a semester, credit hours will be evaluated on the basis of fifteen hours of class instruction per semester hour), or the equivalent:

- When a course is listed as satisfying a specific area of study, the contact hours should equal or exceed the standard for doctoral programs, which is 45 contact hours for a 3-semester-hour course.

- When a single 3 semester course is listed as fulfilling more than one content area, other compensating course coverage must be listed so that each content area has a minimum of 3 semester hours of coverage or its equivalent.
- A doctoral level text and/or reading assignments that are current and suitable for doctoral level courses should be used in each foundation area.
- There are some elements that are present in every adequate syllabus. The instructor is named, and should be qualified, by either training or experience, to teach the material in the course. The time frame is indicated, so that it can be determined whether the course is consistent with the requirement of three credit hours. The required readings are listed, and they should be relevant, current, and of a level sufficient to a graduate course. Assignments are listed by week, so that the scope of the work expected in the course is clear. The method of student evaluation is indicated. Many other items may also be included, consistent with the requirements of each academic institution, but the above are necessary to allow for proper evaluation of the suitability of the course to meet the requirement for which it is being submitted.
- A curriculum vita must be submitted for each faculty member listed in the chart of core and auxiliary faculty members. These curriculum vitae should include items that make clear how the person is qualified, by virtue of education, training, experience, or scholarship, to teach the courses that he or she is responsible for.
- Each course in the scientific foundation areas should be taught by a professor who has been trained in this core scientific area or who has demonstrated competence in this content area by virtue of advanced professional attainment.

The areas that require demonstrated competence are:

a. Scientific and Professional Ethics and Standards

- When a single course is used to satisfy this guideline, scientific and professional ethics and standards should be a major component of the course.
- When scientific and professional ethics and standards are covered in sections of multiple courses, these should be listed in detail, preferably using a table that shows how this coverage is at least equivalent to a 3-semester hour course. Although other ethics codes may be covered, the central focus must be the American Psychological Association's Ethics Code or the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists.

b. Research Design and Methodology

- Although the course(s) should give considerable coverage to quantitative research designs, qualitative research may be covered as well.
- Both two-variable and multi-level multivariate research designs should be taught and students should be able to employ these designs to set up research programs or to evaluate programs that have been reported in the literature.
- Because the research design and methodology content area should be foundational in nature, courses that involve the application of foundational material, such as courses that develop research proposals, will not suffice.

c. Statistics

- The course may cover descriptive statistics but **must** cover inferential statistics at a multivariate level.
- Students should be able to identify which statistics to use for what purposes and also should be able to do statistical calculation either manually or with computerized packages.

d. Psychometric Theory

- The course(s) that cover this topic should be theoretical in nature discussing in considerable detail topics related to test construction and evaluation such as reliability, validity, item analysis, etc.
- Although the use of tests for various domains (e.g., intelligence testing) could be covered, the course(s) meeting this guideline should not primarily teach students how to give and score specific tests for assessment purposes. Applied assessment courses are certainly of value for many programs, but these do not provide instruction in psychometric theory.

e. Biological Bases of Behavior

- While a doctoral-level course in sensation and perception may satisfy this guideline, typically the course(s) listed are a form of biological psychology or psychopharmacology.
- A course in biological psychology should emphasize basic anatomical and neurological functioning. Ideally, the course should cover both micro- (neuron, synapse, neurotransmitters, etc.) and macro-levels (central nervous system and autonomic nervous system structure and functions). The course could cover, but should not be built around, disease models.
- A course in psychopharmacology might be used if it emphasizes the way chemistry interacts with biology to produce behavior. While specific medications could be discussed, the course should be at a more fundamental level than simply a discussion of which medicines to use for which diagnostic categories.
- A course that primarily covers tests that help identify neurological disorders would not be appropriate.

f. Cognitive-Affective Bases of Behavior

- Basic courses in learning, cognition, motivation, and/or emotion would satisfy this guideline.
- A course in learning theory should cover more than just classical and operant conditioning. These topics could form the foundation for a course in learning theory, but learning theory has progressed considerably in the past 50 years. (A course in learning theory intended for educators and classroom teachers would not be appropriate for graduate students in psychology.)
- A cognition course should cover basic topics such as memory, attention, language, problem solving, decision making.

- A basic course in emotion would also satisfy this guideline if it included topics such as: classification of emotion, individual emotions, emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, etc.
- A course in cognitive or cognitive-behavioral therapy or emotions in therapy would not satisfy this guideline.

g. Social Bases of Behavior

- The course most typically listed to satisfy this guideline is advanced social psychology. An ideal course would cover three basic sub-areas: social thinking (self, beliefs, judgments, attitudes), social influence (culture, conformity, persuasion, groups), and social relations (prejudice, aggression, attraction, helping), emphasizing the research findings from each area.
- A single course in group processes might also be appropriate, but it should cover the topic in a basic way emphasizing research findings.
- A course in group or family therapy or multicultural issues would not be appropriate.
- A course emphasizing the social aspects of the therapeutic process would not satisfy the guideline.

h. Individual Differences

- Because most programs seeking designation are in clinical/counseling/school specialties, they typically have multiple courses in abnormal psychology, developmental psychology, or personality theory, each of which should satisfy this guideline.

Notes

- In all courses, there should be a clear means for evaluating students and ascertaining that they have developed competence in the subject matter of the course(s).
- Because the designation application process is a paper review, the JDC can only render a decision based on the documents submitted by the program applicant. Therefore, it is important that the program submit thorough documentation to support each criterion.