

Students' funding and research training issues

Clarisa Markel

Student representative of the CPA's Scientific Affairs Committee (SAC),
and Master's student, School and Clinical Child Psychology Program,
Human Development and Applied Psychology Department,
Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE)/ University of Toronto.

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The primary goals of the CPA's Scientific Affairs Committee are to oversee issues related to the science of psychology across the nation. Specifically, our goals are to promote scientific values and to advocate for and protect academic freedom; work to increase research funding; and promote a synergy between research, education/training and practice and between different areas of psychological research. In order to better understand the needs of graduate students in psychology in terms of funding and research training, the student representative of the CPA's Scientific Affairs Committee (SAC) developed a ten-minute online survey. This column presents a summary of the survey results.

Graduate student members of the CPA Section for Students in Psychology were invited to participate in an online survey that was hosted on the CPA website. Participants were asked about the major issues facing graduate students in psychology in terms of funding and research training, and the ways that the SAC in particular, and CPA in general, could advocate for students' needs. The questions focused on five themes:

1. Number of times students have applied to external funding (SSHRC, NSERC, or CIHR) and number of years that they were funded.

2. Major issues facing students in terms of studentships/fellowships and research funding.

3. Main research training issues facing students in psychology.

4. Topics related to the science of psychology that students would like to see covered at the annual convention.

5. Ways in which the SAC could best respond to students' needs.

Fifty-one graduate student members completed the survey: 24.5% were Masters students and 75.5% were Doctoral students. Two respondents did not provide that information. Students were enrolled in nine different programs: clinical, cognitive science, counselling, developmental, educational/school, health, industrial, quantitative methods, and social/personality. Fifty-six percent of the respondents were in clinical psychology.

1. Students Applying for External Funding

Overall, 84.3% of students had applied for external funding at least once. The maximum number of years applied for external funding was seven, which was reported by 2% of the students. In terms of successful funding applications, 81.4% of students were funded for at least 1 year. Of

these students, the largest percentage (25.6%) was funded only once, closely followed by two years (20.9%), and three years (18.6%). The maximum number of years being funded was five, which accounted for 9.3% of the respondents.

2. Major Research Funding Issues

A primary concern for students was that the competition for the limited number of scholarships was intense. A handful of students in non-traditional (international or on-line) programs reported that funding eligibility criteria often precluded applications. In light of the recent changes to the granting councils, some students also felt inadequately informed as to which research agency to direct their proposal. Students also expressed an interest in obtaining, from their departments, feedback on successful and unsuccessful applications so that they could use this information to assist them in their own grant writing. Additionally, students mentioned that the demand to have a publication record to be competitive for funding is often unattainable at the master's level. Finally, students were discouraged by the heavy emphasis placed on publications over other scholarly achievements such as conference presentations and would appreciate more financial support to present their research in national or international conferences venues.

3. Research Training Issues

A handful of students reported positive experiences in terms of the mentorship received from their programs and supervisors. However, several students reported insufficient one-on-one supervision and dearth of research guidance. In addition, most students reported that their training did not provide adequate training in advanced statistics or manuscript writing, knowledge that is nonetheless required for their research thesis. Students also reported that they had

limited resources available – the main one being funding. When students are not adequately funded by research grants, they have less time to devote to their research because they often need to supplement their income by working part-time. Additionally, students were concerned with the insufficient access to technology and software within their research labs and departments. Clinical students reported that it was challenging to find a balance between time spent on course work, practicum, and research. Given that only a small proportion of students responded to this survey, the extent to which these concerns are representative of the Student Section membership is not known.

4. CPA Science of Psychology Topics

Fifty-three percent of students mentioned an interest in workshops on manuscript writing and the publication process. Fifty-one percent indicated that they would like workshops on finding research jobs after graduate school, including post-doctoral fellowships. Respondents reported that they would also like to have information on Canadian sources of funding and information about pursuing research careers in and outside of academia. Forty-seven percent of respondents expressed an interest in workshops on grant writing.

5. How SAC Can Help

Fifty-seven percent of the students suggested that SAC could advocate for more funding for students by dealing with the Tri-Council agencies and by lobbying in universities to encourage a decrease in tuition fees and increase in part-time work sources. Thirty-four percent suggested actively seeking student input either through surveys or student representatives who can pass on student concerns to the committee. Finally, 22% thought SAC could conduct workshops on getting research funding. The

SAC is actively working to respond to some of these requests. For example, there will be a Student Section/SAC-sponsored workshop on grant writing at the annual convention.

The SAC has also written a policy document and initiated a letter-writing campaign to address concerns regarding recent changes to the granting councils.