

19 NOV. 2010

November 12, 2010



Dr. Peter Graf, President
Canadian Psychological Association
141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 702
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J3

Re: NSERC Eligibility Guidelines

Dear Dr. Graf:

We are writing on behalf of the Dalhousie University Department of Psychology to express our appreciation of the work that the CPA has done to represent the concerns of its membership regarding the restructuring of NSERC's Scholarship and Fellowship eligibility guidelines. We were pleased to learn that NSERC has reversed its decision to not fund graduate students enrolled in clinical psychology programs. Despite this very encouraging news, we believe that some inequities remain for clinical psychology students who wish to conduct basic psychology research (e.g., examining the fundamental mechanisms of sensation, perception, and cognition).

It is our understanding that, at present, clinical psychology students may only apply for NSERC Scholarships or Fellowships if they: 1) propose a research project eligible for funding through NSERC and 2) are supervised by a researcher holding an active NSERC Discovery Grant. We agree entirely with the first of these two criteria; however, we believe that the second criterion unfairly discriminates against students studying clinical psychology. Specifically, students in all other disciplines are not required to be supervised by individuals holding active NSERC Discovery Grants and their eligibility is evaluated based on the nature of their research alone. It is our opinion that the same practice should be applied to clinical psychology students.

There are several reasons why a clinical psychology student might not be able to apply for an NSERC under the current eligibility criteria despite the fact that their research interests best align with NSERC's funding mandate. For example, a student could be supervised by a new professor who has not yet had the opportunity to apply for an NSERC Discovery Grant or a professor who conducts basic psychology research but is funded through an organization other than NSERC. Alternatively, a student could be supervised by a professor who has previously held an NSERC Discovery Grant and will again in the future, but does not hold one at the time of the student's application because he/she is on leave or sabbatical, or was not allocated funding in the most recent Discovery Grant cycle. In each of these cases, a student could be receiving high-level supervision from a basic psychology researcher, but would not meet criteria to apply for funding through NSERC.

Based on a survey of our recent students, we have determined that this outstanding inequity in NSERC's eligibility guidelines would affect a considerable number of the students in Dalhousie University's Clinical Psychology PhD Program. Between the years of 2007 and 2009, 3 of the 17 students admitted to our program were awarded NSERC funding while their supervisors did not hold an NSERC Discovery Grant. In two of these three cases, the students were supervised by a new professor who had not yet applied for an NSERC Discovery Grant. This professor has since been awarded an NSERC Discovery Grant for her cognitive psychology research. In the third case, the student's primary supervisor did not hold an NSERC Discovery Grant at the time of the student's application. However, the student is carrying out a basic science dissertation in collaboration with a co-supervisor who did hold an NSERC Discovery Grant when the student applied. Despite this, the student would not have been eligible under the current guidelines because his primary supervisor did not hold an NSERC award.

We believe that the situations described above are not unique to Dalhousie, but rather are present in many science-oriented psychology departments with clinical training programs. On behalf of all such psychology departments, the Dalhousie University Department of Psychology requests that the CPA continue to petition NSERC with the aim of ensuring that this remaining inconsistency in eligibility criteria is resolved. Specifically, we believe that an applicant's eligibility for funding should be determined on the basis of his/her proposed research rather than the funding that has been awarded to his/her supervisor. If the current eligibility criteria are not revised, promising clinical psychology graduate students will be ineligible for federal funding, which will have serious implications for the future of psychology research in Canada. Again, we would like to express our thanks for the excellent work that the CPA has done in representing its members' interests in this matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. Raymond Klein
Chairman



Dr. Penny Corkum
Director of Clinical Training

cc. Dr. Martha Crago
Vice President Research, Dalhousie University

Dr. Suzanne Fortier
President, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

Dr. Sunny Marche
Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Dalhousie University