First-Year Student Experiences

By Marissa Sklar

A student’s first year in graduate school can be quite a challenging experience. Now that summer break is quickly approaching, let’s check in on our first year students to learn more about their experiences during this first year in the Applied Psychology program.

When asked to think back to what drew them to this particular program, many students felt the reputation of the I/O program and its faculty was superior to other Master’s programs in I/O. Other students were drawn to this program by the sheer level of commitment previous cohorts of students and faculty possessed.

As the year progressed, many students found themselves favoring their statistics courses over the others. Other favorite courses were the seminars in Personnel Psychology. The students favored these courses over others because they felt these courses provided them with the practical experience and competitive advantage necessary for their future career development.

Several students were surprised by some characteristics of the applied psychology program. Some were shocked by how different the MS program is from the MA program. Perhaps on a similar note, others were surprised by the intensity of the workload required of MS students as well as how research oriented this applied program actually is. Additionally, some students were pleasantly surprised by the small class sizes.

As mentioned earlier, there is no doubt one’s first year in any graduate program is challenging. As their first year in this program comes to an end, an overwhelming number of students felt their greatest challenge this year was managing the workload. Balancing the multiple demands of class work, lab work, and thesis work, while putting aside some time for family, friends, and fun was also quite a challenge.

Continued on page 4

Speakers Corner

By Ryan Mills

David C. Morris
Human Resources Manager
Life Technologies

Our first speaker of the semester was David C. Morris, Human Resources Manager at Life Technologies. David received his M.S. degree in I-O Psychology from California State University, San Bernadino in 1998, but has been practicing in the field for about eleven years. He has worked for companies such as Sempra Energy, Americaquest, and Hitachi Consulting. In addition, he has presented at the SIOP conference six times in the last eight years. Since earning his degree, all of David’s jobs have been in HR functions, serving as an Analyst, Senior Specialist, Director, and currently as HR Manager.

David’s biggest, and perhaps most surprising, piece of advice was on the importance of not relying on our technical expertise, but focusing much more on building relationships. In his experience, building quality relationships has resulted in many more quality job opportunities than his expertise as an I/O Psychologist. David stated that a lot of success can be attributed to being in the right place at the right time.

David also offered advice as several of us leave the program and enter the workforce. First, he encouraged us to stay familiar and up-to-date with the I/O literature after we leave the program. Second, he noted that the name of the company we are working for will carry a lot of weight, and that it may be worthwhile to work for a well known company, even if the opportunity is not that great. However, he also stated that in rough economic times like these, to “get whatever experience you can get.” He also stated the importance of finishing the thesis before leaving the program.

Overall, David Morris was an engaging and knowledgeable speaker. His experiences in multiple applied settings have given him the opportunity to succeed, but more importantly to David, the opportunity to grow.
Second-Year Student Experiences

By Marissa Sklar

We’ve taken a variety of classes while in this program. What was everyone’s favorite?
Jessika: Taking into account this year and last, my favorite class was 721.
Linsey: All the seminars were pretty informative.
Ryan: I’m not sure which was my favorite, but at the end of the first year I started to feel like an I/O psychologist.
Stephen: My favorite class was Psychology 622.

What has surprised you all most about this program?
Brandon: How interested I became in the science side of things. I came mostly for the applied side, but have gained a real appreciation for the science side of it. I’ve really enjoyed the research aspect. I’ve been impressed by how balanced the program is between science and practice. This last semester especially has been very applied
Jessika: I didn’t know that there was such a divide between what people who have an MBA do in HR and what people who have an MS do in HR.
Ryan: I was also surprised by how focused it is on the scientific emphasis.

What was the biggest challenge you all have faced in this program?
Linsey: Trying to manage 2 seminars, a GA position, an internship, and write my thesis.
Ryan: My biggest challenge was to do excellent as a grad student as well as a husband/father.
Tressa: My biggest challenge was coming to the conclusion that my entire life was going to revolve around grad school!

Was anybody able to overcome this challenge? How did you do it?
Brandon: Yeah, I don’t watch a minute of TV and pretty much don’t do anything besides work Monday-Friday. But I completely refuse to do a single thing productive on Sunday… that keeps me going.
Ryan: I made family the first priority and school the second.
Tressa: I sucked it up and focused solely on school. My social life ended up coming in dead last most of the time. I am not the youngster I used to be anymore!

Presentations


Note: Names in **bold** indicate faculty, students, or alumni affiliated with the Applied Psychology program.
Second Year Student Experiences continued...

So enough about challenges! What have you all found to be the most enjoyable experience about this program?

Brandon: I got to know all you hoodlums…which I guess you can say is enjoyable!
Linsey: It’s fun working with a great group of people.
Tressa: These people are the only ones who know exactly what my experiences were in grad school. We just went through a very challenging experience together, and I will never forget these guys!

So what are you all doing post-graduation?

Brandon: EUROPE!!! For 6 months…then I start full-time at Qualcomm when I get back in January.
Linsey: Hopefully find a job in San Diego.
Stephen: For now, look for a job!

Now that we’ve been through the whole process of graduating from this program—well, most of us—we should offer advice for future MS students.

Brandon: Don’t wait for the internship to come to you. I started looking as soon as I got here, and I think that really paid off for me. You can sometimes do better by going out and looking rather than waiting for one to show up through the program.

Ryan: I agree. The extent to which this program can improve your career is dependent upon your motivation to learn the science, your personal efforts to apply what you’ve learned, and your willingness to sacrifice what used to be “your” time.

Stephen: Just work hard, and take notes.

Tressa: My greatest advice would be to get a great internship. It can really help you when you are looking for your first job. Buy highlighters in bulk and don’t forget to have some fun sometimes. Try not to beat yourself up if you need to take a day off here or there. Get to know the professors well—they are here to help you out. Last one—just do your thesis.

Does anybody have anything they’d like to say before we part for good?

Brandon: This is truly an amazing program and I credit the faculty for making it what it is today. Thanks for all the time and effort you all put into our development. I can’t say it enough. Special thanks to Keith who has been a great mentor to me throughout.

Ryan: If completing this program was easy, it wouldn’t be worth it.

Stephen: I’ll end with a quote by Friederich Nietzsche: “And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.”

Tressa: Good luck!

Publications


Presentations continued...


Note: Names in bold indicate faculty, students, or alumni affiliated with the Applied Psychology program.

Don’t forget to join the APSA LinkedIn Group. For more information, contact Dr. Lisa Kath.
First Year Student Experiences continued…

In attempting to overcome this challenge, students stressed the importance of keeping a schedule of realistic time lines, and not procrastinating. Although probably not the best way to overcome the challenge of managing the heavy workload, some students simply skipped many hours of sleep!

There was a wide range of responses when reflecting on their most rewarding experiences during this first year. Some students loved the chance to TA for 271 (Data Analysis in Psychology), whereas the few who already found an internship were rewarded by learning how the skills gained in the program can be applied in an organizational setting. Although this first year was originally just an exchange experience for Andree and others from Mannheim, the feeling of being seen more as a full-time student rather than "only an exchange student" was particularly rewarding. Others were simply found the whole graduate school experience to be rewarding.

As these students prepare to enter their second year in the program, many are looking forward to taking classes on the 'Organizational' side of I/O. Although seemingly daunting, all students expressed eager anticipation towards working on their theses! Besides, finishing one’s thesis is the only way to graduate from this program. Hopefully the second year will be just as rewarding an experience as the first!

Speakers Corner continued…

Melinda (Boyd) McCants
Senior Consultant
Clarkson Consulting

Our second speaker of the spring semester was Melinda McCants. Melinda graduated in 2004, and has since served as a consultant and senior consultant at Clarkson Consulting. She has worked with several large companies, performing a wide variety of services, including creating a needs assessment and evaluation for a training program. Melinda defines her role as someone who can "solve problems that a company thinks its employees can’t handle." As a consultant, Melinda travels constantly. Her average work-week consists of flying out to the client’s location on late Sunday night, working through Thursday, and coming home Thursday evening. Although Melinda admits that this can be taxing, she loves travelling and her three-day weekends!

Melinda took a unique road to getting a foot into the consulting door. While many graduates enter into consulting after a few years in a more general position, Melinda entered into consulting right after leaving the program. To students who may want to take a similar path, Melinda counseled to apply for every consulting job we find, and not just limit ourselves to the openings that best suit our desires. She also reiterated the importance of tailoring one’s resume for each position applied. Finally, she suggested that in a time when not many consulting jobs are open, to find a job that would help to develop our skills in many different areas.

When asked about tips for job searching, Melinda urged students to take a systematic approach. Rather than simply "searching," Melinda suggests setting specific time-oriented goals, and to search daily, as most companies update their job postings on a daily basis. She also stated that “it’s not about who you know, it’s about who knows you.” She suggested we identify and make use of the people who know our skill set coming out of this program, including faculty, alumni, and speakers such as herself. She also emphasized the importance of being optimistic in our search.

Finally, as Melinda reflected on the benefits of the Applied Program, she emphasized completing the coursework projects in seminar classes. She brings copies of those finished projects with her to interviews, and has noted that people are impressed that while so young, she’s been able to complete several professional-level projects. This is a reflection of not only her work, but also the quality of the Applied Program at SDSU.

It’s never too early to start making plans to attend SIOP 2010!

When: April 8-10, 2010
Where: Atlanta, GA

For more information: http://www.siop.org/conferences
By Lindsay Palmer

In April 2009 the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) conference took place in New Orleans, Louisiana. Although the conference was held on the other side of the country, the majority of I/O first-year students and faculty were able to attend. Three undergraduate SDSU students who will begin the I/O Program in the Fall were present as well.

As always, the conference schedule was jam-packed with symposia, poster sessions, and panels discussing all topics relevant to I/O. A few of the common themes covered at the conference included leadership, personality, and diversity issues. There were also numerous sessions that pertained specifically to I/O issues relevant in the current economy. Many of the students enjoyed the symposia that were directly relevant to Master’s Programs. For example, there were panels discussing how to get the most out of your graduate internship and also how to look for your first job after completing an I/O Master’s program.

Overall, SDSU faculty and students were well-represented when it came to both oral and poster presentations. Mark Ehrhart participated in a symposium regarding new developments in OCB research. Jeff Conte was a discussant on two panels, one involving multitasking and polychronicity and the second concerning job analysis.

First-year student Heather Yamashita orally presented research done with Lisa Kath on sexual harassment training. Each faculty member was also involved in various posters throughout the weekend as well.

Two first-year students, Zack Girgis and Lindsay Palmer, were able to attend the 2009 Master’s Consortium, held the day before the start of the conference. The consortium invites current master’s students from around the country to attend workshops held by graduates of master’s programs who are currently working in various applied settings. The speakers included internal and external consultants and also managers in Human Resources at major U.S. corporations. The consortium also provided a valuable opportunity to network with other master’s students about to graduate and enter the job market themselves.

At the conclusion of the conference, most first-year students agreed that one of the main highlights of the weekend was being exposed to both sides of the research-practice gap. The posters and symposia not only included up-and-coming research in the I/O field, but also expert advice from practitioners currently working in applied settings. This aspect of the conference was encouraging, especially for the first-years who are about to begin searching for their summer internships.

The 2009 SIOP conference was definitely a huge success. Both students and faculty alike had a great time presenting their own research and at the same time networking with new and old friends and colleagues. Hopefully everyone will try their best to attend the 2010 conference next year in Atlanta!
Dr. Emilio C. Ulloa received the following awards:

- NACADA Outstanding Advising Certificate of Merit 2009
- SDSU Psi Chi Outstanding Professor 2009
- SDSU Mortar Board Outstanding Faculty 2009
- SDSU Quest for the Best Faculty/Staff Award 2009

Note: Names in bold indicate faculty, students, or alumni affiliated with the Applied Psychology program.


The student editors of this issue were Stephen Vong and Lindsay Palmer.

If you would like additional information on the Applied Psychology Student Association (APSA) or anything discussed in this newsletter, please e-mail Dr. Lisa Kath at lkath@sciences.sdsu.edu.


Top: Dr. Jörg Matt making lemonade with Kennedy Roesch.

Left: First year students looking through the tree house (left to right): Sean Foley, Andree Sievers, and Viet Pham.

Additional Information

The student editors of this issue were Stephen Vong and Lindsay Palmer.

If you would like additional information on the Applied Psychology Student Association (APSA) or anything discussed in this newsletter, please e-mail Dr. Lisa Kath at lkath@sciences.sdsu.edu.