

## A Path to PCSAS Accreditation for New Clinical Science Programs

### Overview of a Pathway

PCSAS has created a multiple-stage accreditation process for new CS programs that involves four stages or steps:

1. *Letter of Intent*
2. *Accredited, preliminary*
3. *Accredited, provisional*
4. *Accredited, full*

Under this model, a new program first submits a *Letter of Intent*, as is the case for existing programs seeking PCSAS accreditation for the first time. If after evaluating the *Letter of Intent* it is determined that the new program understands and commits to the goals of the CS model, the program is allowed to apply for *Accredited, preliminary* status. If successful after the review of the application has been conducted, the new program is allowed to begin admitting students. After a period of time, the program is next required to apply, and be reviewed for, *Accredited, provisional* status, an accreditation stage that indicates the program has made significant progress toward establishing a strong CS program. If successful at this stage, the program is next required to apply for *Accredited, full* status, which would indicate success at meeting all accreditation standards normally seen when established programs are reviewed. It is important to note that at each of these stages the program is considered accredited by PCSAS. This is important not only for student recruitment purposes but also for issues related to internships and licensing. More details regarding this process follow.

### The *Letter of Intent*: Eligibility of a New Program

Interested new programs are required to submit a *Letter of Intent* that provides sufficient information to allow for a determination of whether they meet PCSAS's eligibility standards. Like existing programs, interested new programs must show in their *Letter of Intent* that they satisfy the following minimal requirements to be judged eligible to apply for PCSAS accreditation. These minimal requirements include:

- Accreditation is granted for doctoral training programs that grant Ph.D. degrees in psychology with a core focus on the specialty of psychological clinical science. Programs must be housed in departments of psychology (or their equivalent) within regionally accredited, nonprofit, research universities in the U.S. and Canada.
- Accreditation is limited to programs that subscribe to an empirical epistemology and a scientific model, i.e., an educational and clinical training model in which the advancement of knowledge and its application to problems are driven by research evidence, and in which research and application are integrated and reciprocally informing.
- Accreditation is limited to Ph.D. programs with a primary mission of providing all students with high-quality, science-centered education and clinical training that arms them with the knowledge and skills required for successful careers as clinical scientists, broadly defined.
- Accreditation is limited to programs within the intellectual and educational domain of clinical psychology. This may include hybrid varieties, such as health-psychology, clinical-neuroscience, clinical-behavioral genetics, etc. However, to be acceptable the hybrid model must involve the integration of clinical psychology—a focus on psychological knowledge and methods to research and

clinical application relevant to mental and behavioral health problems - with one or more complementary scientific perspectives for the purpose of gaining added leverage on specific target problems. In all cases, clinical psychology must be the core component of the model.

- Accreditation is limited to programs with the primary goal of producing graduates who are competent and successful at (a) conducting research relevant to the assessment, prevention, treatment, and understanding of health and mental health disorders; and (b) using scientific methods and evidence to design, develop, select, evaluate, implement, deliver, supervise, and disseminate empirically based clinical assessments, interventions, and prevention strategies.
- In their Letters of Intent and in public documents (including websites), potential applicants must demonstrate a commitment to providing an education within the boundaries that define PCSAS accreditation, i.e., in scope, epistemology, mission, goal, and domain.
- Potential applicants must agree to conduct a detailed self-study prior to preparing an application for “accredited, preliminary” status, and to provide an accurate summary of the self-study's results in their application materials. Each program must agree to full disclosure of all information the Review Committee requires to carry out its responsibility of evaluating programs and reaching accreditation decisions.
- Applicants must agree to arrange, coordinate, and complete a site visit of their program if, based on review of the self-study documents, the review committee decides they are a candidate for “Accreditation, preliminary” status.
- In order to apply for “Accredited, preliminary” status, applicants must have paid the non-refundable application fee and have signed the PCSAS Applicant Agreement prior to the review of their application.
- Applicants must agree to accept the Review Committee's decision as specified in the Applicant Agreement. However, the decision process may include an appeal in accordance with PCSAS procedures.

#### Accredited, Preliminary Stage of an Applicant Program

If after submitting a *Letter of Intent* it is determined that the applicant program may continue the application process, the program then applies for *Accredited, preliminary* status. At this application stage, the program may not advertise for, recruit, or admit students including soliciting or collecting application fees or applicant information, starting a process for reviewing admissions applications, or scheduling student interviews.

1. Step One: An applicant program deemed eligible after a successful *Letter of Intent* submits a self-study to the Review Committee (RC) that provides a detailed description of how it intends to meet PCSAS expectations in seven general areas of accreditation standards: 1) Conceptual foundations; 2) Design, operation, and resources; 3) Quality of the science training; 4) Quality of the application training; 5) Curriculum and related program responsibilities, including ethics and diversity; 6) Quality improvement; and 7) Outcomes. In the self-study, the applicant program must respond to specific questions in each of these areas and provide supporting appendices. Also, the program is required to disclose a “teach-out” plan in the event that they fail to move to the next stage of accreditation, a plan that details how students matriculating in the program will complete their degree programs if accreditation is withdrawn.
2. Step Two: Two members of the RC draft written reviews of the self-study, and each reviewer make one of two recommendations to the full RC: 1) the reviewer could recommend

- denying further continuation of the *Accredited, preliminary* review process because the applicant program has not made sufficient progress in program development; or 2) the reviewer could recommend that the program continue in the *Accredited, preliminary* review process and a site visit would be scheduled, typically within six months. The full RC then meets to decide whether a site visit is warranted or if the self-study requires revision.
3. Step Three: Should a site visit be approved by the full RC, two RC members who were not involved in the review in step two conduct a site visit and draft a site-visit report.
  4. Step Four: After the site visit, the full RC meets to decide about whether to deny or grant *Accredited, preliminary* status to the applicant program for a period of up to five years. If the RC determines that the program has made sufficient planning progress, the RC can approve *Accredited, preliminary* status and the program may begin accepting applications for enrollment. If the RC denies the *Accredited, preliminary* status, then the Applicant program would have up to two additional opportunities to revise their materials and be re-evaluated for *Accredited, preliminary* status. A minimum of one year must elapse between reviews and revisions must be received within two years of the review decision. If more than two years elapses between reviews, the applicant program must submit a new application for *Accredited, preliminary* status and also pay a re-application fee.
  5. No students can be admitted to the program until *Accredited, preliminary* status is achieved. Failure to gain the *Accreditation, preliminary* status after three attempts will result in denial of accreditation for the program.

#### *Accredited, Provisional Stage for an Accredited, Preliminary Program*

1. Step One: An *Accredited, preliminary* program must submit a self-study to the RC no less than five years after admitting its first class or no more than seven years after being granted *Accredited, preliminary* status. The self-study provides a detailed description of how the program is meeting PCSAS expectations in seven general areas of accreditation standards: 1) Conceptual foundations; 2) Design, operation, and resources; 3) Quality of the science training; 4) Quality of the application training; 5) Curriculum and related program responsibilities, including ethics and diversity; 6) Quality improvement; and 7) Outcomes. Programs adhere to the General Template for PCSAS Programs, with the exception of descriptions of distal outcomes (e.g., internship placements, post-internship positions), which will not yet exist as students presumably will not yet have graduated from the program. Detailed information must be provided instead on proximal outcomes for all students who have matriculated into the new program, such as summary statistics across students for publications/presentations/awards, a narrative description of how each student is doing in the program from both a clinical and a research perspective, and each student's current CV (among other requested information). An application fee is required at this time.
2. Step Two: After submission of the completed self-study, two RC members next draft paper reviews, and two RC members conduct a site visit, typically within six months of the submission of the self-study.
3. Step Three: The full RC next meets to decide whether to deny or grant *Accreditation, provisional* status to the *Accredited, preliminary* program for a period of up to seven years. If the RC determines that the program is compliant with PCSAS accreditation standards, the RC approves an *Accredited, provisional* status. If the RC determines that the program is in minor noncompliance with some accreditation standards, the RC can grant the *Accredited, provisional* status but require one or more written status reports that address the

noncompliance issues. The program remains in *Accredited, preliminary* status if not successful with the *Accredited, provisional* application. Programs may make up to two additional attempts for *Accredited, provisional* status with a minimum of one year elapsing between reapplications. Reapplications must be received within two years of an RC decision. Failure to proceed to the status after three attempts will result in loss of accreditation for the program. Students admitted after that time will be considered as matriculating in a non-accredited program.

#### Accredited, Full Stage for an Accredited, Provisional Program

1. Step One: An *Accredited, provisional* program must submit a self-study to the RC no later than seven years after the date on which the *Accredited, provisional* stage was granted to begin the process of obtaining *Accredited, Full* status. The self-study provides a detailed description of how it is meeting PCSAS expectations in seven general areas of accreditation standards: 1) Conceptual foundations; 2) Design, operation, and resources; 3) Quality of the science training; 4) Quality of the application training; 5) Curriculum and related program responsibilities, including ethics and diversity; 6) Quality improvement; and 7) Outcomes (including distal outcomes). Programs should adhere to the General Template for PCSAS Programs, with the addition of providing detailed information on the proximal outcomes for all students who have matriculated into the new program but have not yet graduated, including a narrative description of how each student is doing in the program from research and clinical perspectives and each student's current CV. An application fee is required at this time.
2. Step Two: After submission of the completed self-study, two RC members would draft paper reviews, and two RC members would conduct a site visit, typically within six months of the submission of the self-study.
3. Step Three: The full RC would meet to decide whether to deny or grant *Accredited, Full* status to the *Accredited, provisional* program for a period of up to seven years. If the RC determines that the program is in full compliance with accreditation standards, the RC can approve the *Accredited, full* status. If the RC determines that the program is in minor noncompliance with some accreditation standards, the RC can extend the *Accredited, provisional* status for up to five years but require one or more written status reports addressing the noncompliance issues. If the RC denies the move to *Accredited, full* status, then the program may not reapply for a period of one year from the time of the decision to deny *Accredited, full* status. Reapplications must be received within two years of the RC decision. Failure to proceed to obtain *Accreditation, full* status after three attempts will result in loss of accreditation for the program. Students admitted after that time will be considered as matriculating in a non-accredited program.

#### Renewal of Accreditation of an Accredited, Full Program

This procedure is the same as currently used for existing programs seeking reaccreditation.