

APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AT LUC

Detailed Program Description

The challenge offered to applied social science graduate programs is to develop systematic ways of bringing the very best of scientific and professional knowledge to bear on the problems of individuals, groups, organizations and society as a whole. One way to meet this challenge is to train applied researchers in the theories, principles and methods of social psychology. The role of the researcher proposed here is that of knowledge builder and knowledge user in the service of rational changes directed toward promoting human welfare. Thus, in contrast to graduate training in other disciplines such as clinical, counseling or school psychology that prepare students to provide direct therapeutic services to individual clients, the major aim of the Applied Social Psychology Program is to prepare students for careers in applied research. We seek to train professionals who can identify significant problems, design and implement changes intended to alleviate those problems, and empirically evaluate these changes. This training model is responsive to continuing national concern about the impact of social action programs, the demand for accountability regarding the utility of social sciences, and the general movement among scientists themselves to be more useful to society.

The Social Psychology Program at Loyola University has been in existence since 1965. For the first nine years, the program was a traditional social psychology program with an emphasis on theory testing in laboratory settings. Starting in 1974, the faculty decided to expand the program, emphasizing an additional aspect - applied social psychology. This aspect was developed in response to student and faculty interests, shrinking job opportunities in academic settings for traditionally trained social psychologists, and the apparent societal need and demand for applied researchers. Typically, over half of our students are interested in pursuing applied research careers in primarily non-academic settings. However, our program still offers rigorous training in basic social psychology for students wishing to pursue more traditional academic careers. The substantive content of many of our courses and the nature of much of a student's research experience are not unlike more traditional, non-applied programs. Most of our graduates who have desired to do so have obtained faculty positions in academic institutions. In essence, the applied aspect of our Program constitutes a strong emphasis within the broader training available in social psychology, which affords our graduates an unusually wide range of employment options.

Given our conceptualization of the applied social psychologist as one who generates and employs socially useful information, our training program has been designed to provide opportunities for students to acquire a broad range of knowledge and skills. Perhaps foremost among these is knowledge of the current state of thinking regarding the fundamental and traditional concerns of social psychologists, including attitudes and attitude change, social judgment and perception, social influence, group decision-making and problem solving, and inter-group relations. Knowledge of these and other traditional topic areas provides the unique perspective that distinguishes a social psychologist from other students of human affairs. However, in developing the Applied Social Program it was clear that, while intensive training in one discipline (social psychology) may be an advantage, knowledge of other disciplines was also required if our students were to adequately deal with social problems. Thus, students are encouraged to take courses and consult with professors in other departments and programs according to their own interests. Furthermore, the Program offers a number of relatively unique courses that allow students to study applications of social psychology to various social issues

and institutions, such as health care, community affairs, education, profit and non-profit organizations, and criminal justice.

In addition to training in the fundamentals of social psychology, allied disciplines and social problem areas, the Program equips students with those technical skills required for researchers in both laboratory and field settings. Through coursework, research experience and the field internship, students acquire familiarity with an unusually wide range of research designs, evaluation skills, methodological techniques and materials, and statistical analyses. These types of technical skills are not only essential for research practice, they represent training outcomes that are the best recognized and highly valued by non-academic employers.

We envision the professional role of the applied social psychologist as one that entails not only research, but also problem identification, and translation of theory and basic research into ideas for the planning and implementation of social programs and policies. In fulfilling these and other functions, applied social psychologists must often function as liaisons among the research community, funding sources, program administrators and practitioners and society at large. They must be able to communicate effectively in speaking and writing to people filling a variety of roles other than psychologists. For this reason our Program offers training and experience designed to develop a student's oral and written communication skills. Through coursework, colloquia, and the internship program, students will have ample opportunities to hone their writing and presentation skills. We also offer students opportunities to teach, both through the Graduate School's Teaching Fellows program and part-time instructorships. Thus, students not only learn to develop and discover knowledge, but also learn to disseminate it effectively.

Part of the program's foundation includes our commitment to education that values human diversity with respect to such considerations as race, ethnicity, gender, age and religion, among others. This commitment is reflected in the diversity of our faculty and students, the activities of the department's Multicultural Affairs Committee, and the types of teaching and research topics undertaken by faculty and students in the program. These features are supported by university-wide initiatives to foster appreciation of human diversity, and by the stimulating variety of people who live in the Chicagoland area.

In summary, Loyola's Applied Social Psychology Program was conceived in the early 1970's as a way of responding to demands both within and outside of academic social psychology for our discipline to become more socially useful. In its ensuing development over the years (e.g., modification of degree requirements, addition of new courses) the program has maintained its central focus on the goal of training students in basic social psychological perspectives, applied social problem areas, research methodology and other professional skills. And, in so doing, we have made every effort to remain flexible in accommodating both marketplace needs and the particular interests of individual students.