Context

The Northern Illinois University graduate programs in educational psychology prepare individuals to work as masters- or doctoral-level educational psychologists in a variety of settings and roles, including as college and university faculty, directors of research and assessment in school districts, research specialists in private research organizations, and as highly effective teachers and leaders in PK-12 schools. Over the past several years, the educational psychology faculty has worked to increase the rigor and improve the quality of our graduate students’ professional preparation experiences to ensure that they achieve essential competencies for success as educational psychologists.

Methods

In the final semester of course work, doctoral students present a portfolio of academic work from their program of study aligned with the first six program learning outcomes (below). Each doctoral student gives a presentation of their portfolio to a faculty committee which assesses its quality, using a rubric. Upon successful completion of the portfolio, the student is admitted to doctoral candidacy and then undertakes and completes the dissertation. The student’s dissertation is assessed by the members of the dissertation committee, and a rubric is used as part of this evaluation process as well.

Desired Doctoral Student Outcomes: Program of Study Portfolio

1. Set & attain individual goals for professional growth & development.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of research methodologies.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of theory & expertise in a domain within educational psychology.
4. Demonstrate effective oral & written communication & presentation skills.
5. Demonstrate knowledge & application of ethical standards.
6. Demonstrate evidence of successful internship experience.

Target: 100% of students meet standards on all parts of the rubric.

Desired Doctoral Candidate Outcomes: Dissertation

In addition to #1-6 above,
7. Demonstrate knowledge of research methodologies.
8. Demonstrate knowledge of theory & expertise in a domain within educational psychology.

Desired Masters’ Student Outcomes: Project or Thesis

Masters’ degree students may complete either a project or a thesis. A faculty committee evaluates each project or thesis at both the proposal and final defense presentations.

Target: 80% of students score satisfactorily on each rubric item identified at the proposal stage and 100% at the defense stage.

Evidence of Doctoral Student Proficiency:

Portfolio: Three students were assessed in 2009-10. Target met: All of these students met the standards for all rubric items.

Dissertation: Three students were assessed in 2009-10. Target met: Two students met the standards for all rubric items. One student did not achieve standard on one rubric item (subsequently resolved satisfactorily). Student portfolios were, as over the previous three years, very strong.

Evidence of Masters’ Student Proficiency:

Proposal stage: Two students reviewed in 2009-10. Defense stage: Four students defended theses in 2009-10. Target exceeded: All students scored satisfactory on rubric items.

Results

How are the assessment results being used?

The educational psychology faculty initiated an annual progress review system for all doctoral students. This process enables faculty to address students’ needs earlier within their program of study, provide corrective guidance, assistance and advice to prepare students to achieve program and individual goals and meet learning standards. This outcome reflects the faculty’s commitment to maintaining the quality of student research. We have also focused on increasing the quality of students’ writing in courses which generate artifacts for the portfolio. At both the masters’ and doctoral levels, emphasis on students’ research skills is intensified by grant-funded research assistantships and support for students to attend and present their research at academic conferences.