

# UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON SYSTEM

## PRELIMINARY PLANNING REVIEW (PPR)

**\*PLEASE TYPE ALL INFORMATION\***

**Location:** UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

**College/School:** EDUCATION

**Department (if applicable):** PSYCHOLOGICAL, HEALTH & LEARNING SCIENCES

**Program (if applicable):** N/A

**Full title of proposed degree:** PhD in HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

**Faculty contact information:** DR. JOHN SMITH, DEPARTMENT CHAIR, 713-743-1234, [jsmith@central.uh.edu](mailto:jsmith@central.uh.edu)

**DIRECTIONS:** Use the [Academic Programs PPR Model](#) as a guide for the development of the three sections below.

**Section 1 – Executive Summary:** Use the following as subheadings (3-5 pages with Times New Roman 12-pt font, 1” margins).

1. Alignment with [UH System Goals](#) and [University Mission Statement](#)
2. Congruence with [Provost’s Success Indicators](#) and strategic plan of the college
3. Program description (including catalog description)
4. Student and job market demand (including specific professions and employers directly related to proposed degree)
5. Program duplication
6. Faculty resources
7. State or national need
8. Program assessment (i.e. mission, student learning, and program outcomes)

**Section 2 – References/Citations:** Provide supporting documentation. Should be no more than one page.

**Section 3 – Business Pro Forma:** Establish financial projections over the initial five-year period of the proposed program. Please consult your College Business Administrator for assistance.

### **REQUIRED SIGNATURES:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Chair (or equivalent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
College/School Dean

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Please submit to the Office of the Provost:  
Daniel Chang  
Program Director, Academic Programs  
713-743-7757 | [danchang@uh.edu](mailto:danchang@uh.edu)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
SVC/SVP for Academic Affairs and Provost

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Please Note:** Assertions and/or claims that are made in the Executive Summary should be supported with citations and listed fully in the Reference Section (Section 2). Please avoid stating unsubstantiated assertions and/or claims about the proposed program.

The SVC/SVP for Academic Affairs and Provost’s signature is confirmation that the degree under consideration is **ready for full proposal development** and formal internal reviews.

Preliminary review approval **does not guarantee** that the Provosts’ Council will approve the proposed program if the academic unit prepares the full proposal. However, it does indicate that the SVC/SVP considers the program area and level to be consistent with the mission of the UH System

## Executive Summary

### 1. Alignment with UH System Goals and University Mission Statement

The mission of the University of Houston (UH) is to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in a real-world setting with the ultimate goal of serving the region and impacting the world.<sup>1</sup> A central strategic initiative for the UH is to achieve these goals within the context of the health professions in order to meet the health care shortage and contribute to one of the largest and fastest growing industries in Texas.<sup>2</sup> Health Psychology is an interdisciplinary subspecialty of psychology dedicated to promoting and maintaining health as well as preventing and managing illnesses that has a significant role to play in the meeting the demands within the health care market. Health Psychology as a discipline offers professional psychology and research-scientist PhD degrees, the latter emphasizing preparation for a research-based career.<sup>3</sup> A research-scientist Health Psychology PhD degree is not currently offered at the UH, but its development and promotion could substantially contribute to the UH's goal of impacting health-related research and education across the state and nation. We herein propose to meet this need through the creation of a research-scientist Health Psychology PhD degree program at the UH.

The mission of the proposed research-scientist Health Psychology PhD program is to advance science and evidence-based applications that increase health equity among diverse populations through meaningful research; produce a cadre of scientifically-minded, culturally-competent scholars who are committed to the pursuit of health equity through rigorous training and mentorship; and contribute to the health of the community and the future of the discipline through service and leadership. As such, it is fully aligned with the missions of the College (Education; COE) and Department (Psychological, Health, & Learning Sciences; PHLS), which are to: *"...lead and inspire generative transformations of learning, health, leadership, and well-being by developing new knowledge for an increasingly diverse world,"* and to *"...advance scientific knowledge, effect real-world change, maximize student potential for global competitiveness, and enhance the quality and length of life in all segments of society,"* respectively. The emphasis on health, well-being, and quality of life enhancement in both of these mission statements provides a strong fit for a Health Psychology PhD Program. Moreover, the emphasis on diversity and reaching all segments of the population supports the programs' emphasis on cultural-competency and the pursuit of health equity.

Through engagement in rigorous scientific inquiry and practice that aligns with the UH Tier One mission,<sup>4</sup> students in this program will develop a deep understanding of the health psychology best practices associated with promoting and maintaining health and thereby increase their competitiveness for important roles within the health professions upon their graduation. Graduate training will focus on exploring and addressing factors that contribute to health disparities, or the unequal and inequitable burden of poor health within a population group, through a distinct programmatic emphasis in this area. With attention to the interplay between scholarship and community-focused efforts to address local health disparities,<sup>5</sup> graduates of this program will be equipped with evidence-based knowledge and skills to positively affect the health of diverse individuals across the lifespan both locally and abroad. Thus, the proposed Health Psychology PhD program reflects the UH system's goals and mission by design, as well as those of the College (COE) and Department (PHLS), and will enhance the University's reputation as a regional as well as national and global leader in addressing society's growing

health care needs, thereby facilitating the attraction and retention of the highest caliber faculty and students.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Congruence with Provost's Success Indicators and strategic plan of the college

The Strategic Plan of the College is committed to each Provost Success Indicator in the following way – (explain and insert here). In this respect, the proposed degree offering will do the following as this concerns our Strategic Plan – (explain and insert here).

## 3. Program Description

*Program description.* The Health Psychology PhD program will provide students with comprehensive training focused on understanding empirically-based theories and methods of health psychology, an interdisciplinary subspecialty of psychology dedicated to promoting and maintaining health as well as preventing and managing illnesses. The proposed Health Psychology PhD program is unique in its emphasis on health disparities. Through this emphasis, embedded within the curriculum, doctoral students will learn how the discipline of health psychology can contribute to the aspirational goal of achieving health equity in our society. Consequently, training in the doctoral program will equip students with the skills necessary to conduct innovative, meaningful research that will contribute to the discipline of health psychology and health equity within society. The doctoral program's coursework, research, and other training activities will be designed to meet the following three objectives:

- 1) To provide students with knowledge of the theoretical and methodological foundation of the field of health psychology.
- 2) To provide students with the training and cutting-edge skills needed to lead and conduct high-impact health psychology research that contributes to health equity in diverse populations.
- 3) To train students to translate health psychology research findings into recommendations for best practices in health promotion, policy development, and disease prevention.

The degree requirements for our 81 credit hour program include the successful completion of required coursework, a candidacy project, a competency exam, and a dissertation project.

*Catalog description.* The Health Psychology PhD is designed to provide students with theoretical and methodological foundations in the field of health psychology and will prepare them to enter careers in research, academia, and the health field. The PhD program emphasis on health disparities offers students a unique opportunity to obtain training in health psychology as it relates to health equity and community-focused health psychology research. Students will participate in training activities that include health psychology coursework with an emphasis on health disparities and working with health faculty currently conducting community-based, health disparities focused research.

## 4. Student and Job Market Demand

An important role of the health psychologist is to generate new knowledge regarding individual, social, and contextual factors that influence health behaviors with the aim of

promoting health equity and addressing critical issues that affect the health and well-being of our local, state, national and global communities. The Health Psychology PhD program will produce professionals with marketable skills to address a growing demand in these areas.

*Student demand.* Within the next ten years, national post-baccalaureate enrollment is projected to increase to 3.5 million students.<sup>6</sup> The UH's location within the fourth largest metropolitan area in the U.S., which houses one of the largest medical centers in the world, will attract high caliber candidates. Currently, 24% of UH degrees have a pathway to health-related jobs, supporting the local demand for degree programs contributing to the health professions.<sup>2</sup> The Health Psychology PhD program will have the opportunity to recruit from a growing pool of students including under-represented racial and ethnic groups that have been historically under-recruited into health psychology doctoral programs. Ethnically and professionally diverse faculty in the Health Psychology PhD program and the culture of diversity at the University of Houston will also appeal to a broader candidate pool.

*Job market demand.* The United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides detailed projections for health industry occupations. According to the BLS, between 2014 and 2024 over three million new jobs in the health professions will become available for potential employees.<sup>7</sup> According to the Texas Workforce Commission, 18 of the 25 fastest-growing occupations are in the health and medical professions.<sup>8</sup> The shortage of qualified health care professionals to meet current workforce needs is well known.<sup>4</sup> These clear indicators of market demand must be met with a supply of qualified health professionals to which the Health Psychology PhD program can contribute.

Specific jobs include psychologist, advocate, or expert in numerous settings such as counseling, clinical health, community health, critical health, public health, occupational health. Additional roles include health researcher, educator and/or trainer. Employers are diverse with both public and private sectors broadly coveting such graduates.

## 5. Program Duplication

According to the Health Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, there are approximately 23 dedicated research-scientist Health Psychology programs nationwide, only two of which are located in Texas.<sup>3</sup> One of the two offers a terminal Master's degree (Texas State University) and the other is a PhD program at the University of Texas Arlington, offering a PhD in Health and Neuroscience Psychology and a concentration in Health Psychology. Our own research unearthed a second PhD program at the University of Texas El Paso offering a Health Psychology PhD degree. We are aware of no dedicated Health Psychology PhD programs in the Houston metropolitan area, and none in the U.S. with an explicit emphasis in health disparities. Given the aforementioned shortage of professionals in the health care field<sup>2</sup> and the sizeable number of eligible undergraduates in Texas annually,<sup>9</sup> the dearth of Health Psychology PhD programs in the state represents a serious impediment to meeting the needs of residents and achieving equity in health across our diverse state.

## 6. Faculty Resources

The Department of Psychological, Health, & Learning Sciences (PHLS) will house the Health Psychology PhD program. Faculty for the program will be drawn primarily from the extant undergraduate public health, allied health, and health promotion program areas. There are 7 core, tenured/tenure track faculty who will be integral to the PhD program and who can direct dissertation research: Drs. Chakema Carmack (Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Community Psychology, 2007), Virmarie Correa-Fernandez (Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, 2003), Rosenda Murillo (Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Health Behavior, 2012),

Norma Olvera (Professor, Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology, 1992), Lorraine Reitzel (Associate Professor, Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, 2005), Ezemenari Obasi (Associate Professor, Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology, 2005), and Nathan G Smith (Associate Professor, Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology, 2002). Each of these individuals has a 2:2 FTE teaching load. There are 3 additional full-time support faculty: Drs. Kelli Drenner (Clinical Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Public Health – Behavioral Sciences, 2009), Ken Ripperger-Suhler (Clinical Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Health Promotion, 2010), and Kayce Solari Williams (Clinical Assistant Professor, Ph.D. in Health Education, 2015). Each of these individual teaches a 4:4 FTE teaching load within the program.

Faculty have expertise in a range of health-related research areas (e.g., alcohol, anxiety, depression, diabetes, cardiovascular health, cancers, endocrinology, social determinants, obesity, physical activity, tobacco, and illicit drugs) and ongoing relationships with a number of underserved and vulnerable community partners (e.g., African Americans, individuals who are homeless, Latinos/as, sexual minority communities, individuals with behavioral and mental health care needs, outpatients). Over the last 5 years, core faculty have published 148 peer-reviewed journal articles in top health psychology journals including *Health Psychology*, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, and *Social Science & Medicine*. Moreover, the core faculty participated in \$23.5M in local, state, and federal grant funding over the last 5 years; \$3.6M directly awarded to UH. Together, their work contributes to the advancement of Health Psychology as a discipline and enhances evidence-based application in the field, facilitating progress in the achievement of health equity among diverse populations. Faculty in the health program have dedicated lab space within the Department of Psychological, Health & Learning Sciences within which to host meetings and collect data, and access to equipment and software to facilitate their research agendas and to train students in the methods of health psychology.

#### 7. Brief Summary: State or National Need

The Health Psychology PhD program will provide students with the opportunity to obtain rigorous training comparable to other high quality programs by providing similar core courses in the curriculum and rigorous research experiences. It benefits from a unique emphasis in health disparities, with is unique among other high-quality programs but which addresses critical needs in the Houston metropolitan area and abroad to develop and implement evidence-based practices to effectively address and eliminate health disparities. It meets a growing demand for the production of health professionals in the state and nationally whose work focuses on addressing and eliminating health disparities, and will represent the only Health Psychology PhD program in the Houston metropolitan area in this area and the only one in Texas or potentially even nationally with this explicit focus.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the development of the Health Psychology PhD is consistent with ongoing PHLS strategic planning efforts aimed at building a Top-25 department (national competitiveness). Moreover, it will be a cost-effective addition by replacing two master's programs (i.e., Health Education and Allied Health Education & Administration) with a much needed doctoral program that will significantly contribute to the number of doctoral degrees awarded, high-impact journal articles, extramural research expenditures, private donations, and community advancement. Of note, this degree is more reflective of the current talents we have in the program area and broader department.

## 8. Program Assessment

The mission of the Health Psychology PhD program comprises reference to scholarship, teaching, and service endeavors. Accordingly, the program evaluation will be used to monitor and document progress toward achieving all aspects of the program mission in an ongoing manner, while identifying weaknesses that can be remedied through immediate data-driven action planning.

Program faculty's engagement in scholarship, teaching, and service will be evaluated quantitatively in an annual faculty evaluation process conducted by the department, with appropriate adjustment based on position (i.e., tenure-track/tenured vs clinical) and budgeted time. Areas of assessment will include grant submissions, awards, and expenditures; empirical publication in peer-reviewed journals with weighting for impact factors and student co-authorship; instructional ratings by students; participation in peer-based course observations and evaluations; evidence of instructional innovation; service to the community; and contribution to the program, department, college, university, and discipline through active engagement and leadership. Reflective of program membership, specific foci of scholarship, teaching, and service endeavors should be those of known repute within the health psychology field. Faculty are expected to meet or exceed departmental expectations in these major areas of assessment, and will work closely with the Chair and Program Area Coordinator to develop action planning to enable success in any areas of weakness.

Assessments of student learning are built upon the development of professional competencies. Established frameworks will be used to delineate the major competency domains of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values expected of the Health Psychology PhD students.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Within each domain, behavioral anchors will guide the student's learning assessments in both formal coursework as well as lab/field experiences. Examples of assessment methods include: written exams and term papers, oral presentations, self-assessment activities, community case studies, research manuscripts for publication, comprehensive exams, and thesis/dissertation. The faculty will adjust the evaluation criteria for each domain according to the assessment strategies used. Faculty will monitor student progress through semi-annual review meetings and will implement individualized improvement plans with students who are failing to meet professional competency benchmarks.

Program outcomes will be measured based on the University of Houston's 18 characteristics of Texas Public Doctoral Programs.<sup>13</sup> Examples of these characteristics include, but are not limited to, graduation rates, average time to degree, student-core faculty ratio, student and faculty diversity, student and faculty scholarship, and employment profile of graduates. The ability of students to develop professional competencies within appropriate time periods will serve to identify areas in which the match between program activities and student abilities meets or does not meet expectations. Exit interviews will provide vital information on program effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses. Follow-up surveys of alumni will serve as an ultimate indicator of success with regard to professional development (e.g., continuing competency and job market) and will provide a source of continuous insight to guide program improvement. The program faculty will meet annually to review progress in these areas and engage in strategic planning for programmatic improvement.

## References

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4. University of Houston System Mission and Vision Statement. See: <http://www.uhsa.uh.edu/chancellor/planning-and-performance/index.php>. Accessed on 2/10/16.
5. The State of Health in Houston/Harris County 2015-2016. Harris County Healthcare Alliance, Houston, Texas. See: [http://houstonstateofhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Houston\\_Harris\\_County\\_State\\_of\\_Health\\_2015-20161.pdf](http://houstonstateofhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Houston_Harris_County_State_of_Health_2015-20161.pdf) Accessed on 2/10/16.
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13. Characteristics of UH Doctoral Programs. See: <http://www.uh.edu/graduate-school/prospective-students/programs/doctoral-program-characteristics/>. Accessed on 2/17/16.