

AFRICAN AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS  
OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AS A CAREER OPTION

by

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Students in public schools are becoming more diverse, yet the school psychologists who serve them are still primarily Caucasian. One of the goals of the profession is to diversify the workforce; although there is a shortage of school psychologists, filling open positions with individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds remains difficult. Utilizing an African American presenter to provide information about a career in school psychology is one strategy to recruit individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in to the profession. Some research suggests that African Americans prefer career role models of the same race while other research suggests that interpersonal skills are more influential than race alone. Since most school psychologist practitioners, faculty, and students in school psychology graduate training programs are not African American, it is important to understand whether information provided by a Caucasian presenter would also increase African American students' interest in school psychology.

The main purpose of this study is to understand if the race of the presenter providing information about a career in school psychology impacts participants' interest in school psychology. Twenty-five African American undergraduate psychology majors completed a pre-intervention survey, listened to a brief information session about a career in school psychology presented by a Caucasian presenter, and completed a post-intervention survey. There was

significant change in interest in school psychology as a career following the information session. The change in the participants' expressed interest was not significantly different from that of a previous study in which the presenter was African American.

The career information session conducted by a Caucasian presenter to students from diverse ethnic backgrounds seems as effective in increasing interest in the field as that presented by an African American. This provides some evidence that school psychology practitioners, faculty, and students in school psychology graduate training programs could be effective recruiters of diverse individuals into the field even if they are not African American. Accurate information also increases African American participants' perception that a career in school psychology can meet multiple career satisfaction domains. These career domains match the domains that practicing school psychologists find most satisfying about their careers, indicating that participants have a more realistic view of the career satisfactions provided by a school psychology career. Increasing ethnically diverse students' interest in school psychology may increase their likelihood of enrolling in a graduate training program and eventually practicing school psychology.

AFRICAN AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS  
OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AS A CAREER OPTION

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by

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The role of a school psychologist is to enhance the academic, social and emotional development of children and adolescents (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). The primary functions through which this is accomplished include consultation, evaluation, prevention, and intervention. School psychologists work with children and adolescents, their families, and other professionals who serve students in an educational setting. School psychologists have the expert psychological knowledge necessary to identify students' diverse needs and ensure that services are available to meet these needs in an educational setting.

### *Diversity in Public Schools*

The ethnic make-up of students in the United States of America is changing rapidly, and schools have seen a sharp increase in students from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 1985, 69.6% of students enrolled in public schools were Caucasian, 16.8% were African American, and 10.1% were Hispanic. Twenty years later, 57.6% were Caucasian, 15.6% were African American, 19.7% were Hispanic, 3.9% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.7% were American Indian/Alaskan Native (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Projections are that by 2050, nearly 50% of the U.S. population will be comprised by people of color (Anderson & Massey, 2001).

Public schools in North Carolina have also seen changes in the ethnic background of their students. During the 1987-1988 school year, Caucasian students made up nearly 70% of the population, and more recently make up approximately 56% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). The largest increases were in the number of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander students.

Although diversity in the general education setting is increasing, special education students are disproportionately from minority groups. African American, Hispanic/Latino, and

Native American/Alaskan Native children are over-represented in special education categories (i.e. learning disabled, intellectually disabled, and emotionally disturbed) and under-represented in the gifted education category (deValenzuela, Copeland, Huaqing, & Park, 2006; Ford, 1998). This is a problem because of the negative effects of labeling, the potential for educational inequities, and the ineffectiveness of special education for many students (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

### *Diversity in School Psychology*

Although students attending public schools are more diverse, the ethnic backgrounds of the nation's school psychologists remains relatively unchanged over the past 20 years. Caucasians comprised 96% of school psychologists during the 1980-1981 school year. Those of African American and Hispanic/Latino backgrounds each comprised 1.5% of school psychologists, and Asian American/Pacific Islander and Native American/Alaskan Native each comprised less than 1% of school psychologists (Smith, 1984). In 2003, 91% of school psychologists were Caucasians, 2.4% were African American, 1.7% were Hispanic/Latino, 1.1% were Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, and less than 1% were Native American/Alaskan Natives (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003).

The discrepancy in ethnic background between students and school psychologists presents a potential problem. Students should be served by school psychologists of a variety of ethnic backgrounds because of the unique needs of students from ethnic minority groups (NASP, 2009). The likelihood for misunderstandings, misdiagnoses and use of inappropriate interventions is increased due to ethnic differences between the psychologist and the student (Zhou et al., 2004). This is not thought to be intentional, but instead, reflects differences in an understanding of cultural norms, traditions, awareness, and customs (Waite, 2007).

### *Recruiting a Diverse School Psychology Workforce*

The underrepresentation of ethnic minority school psychologists can be remedied by making greater efforts to recruit a diverse group of graduate students. Good information is critical to selecting a career. If students are not aware of school psychology they cannot pursue it as a career. One important first step is informing students about a career in school psychology. This is potentially a problem because students do not have enough accurate information about school psychology (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001). Students report knowing less about school psychology than other psychology sub-disciplines such as clinical and counseling psychology. Only twenty-two percent of African American students in one study are familiar or very familiar with school psychology, while 42% are familiar or very familiar with clinical psychology and 61% are familiar or very familiar with counseling psychology (Waite, 2007). More information about clinical psychology is typically available to undergraduates than information about school psychology (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001). Undergraduate students report learning more about clinical psychology through professors, textbooks, and media; while information about school psychology was most often gathered through friends/family or personal experience. Some have even referred to a “clinical psychology bias” in undergraduate education (Korn & Lewandowski, 1981).

### *Recruiting African American Graduate Students*

Buikstra, Eley, and Hindmarsh (2007) found that participants involved in a career information workshop rated the workshop as the highest contributing factor or a high contributing factor influencing their course decisions. Waite (2007) developed a brief information session about school psychology for African American undergraduate psychology students. Students were more interested in school psychology and perceived that a career in

school psychology was better able to satisfy their occupational needs following the information session.

The presenter in the Waite (2007) study was African American. Presenter race may influence African American students' perceptions during presentations about school psychology as a career. Race may play a role in how well information is received by students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Some previous research found that minority students prefer career role models from the same race (Rodriguez, 1994; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004). Vaughn (1990) suggests increasing the amount of ethnically diverse faculty and administration before actively recruiting ethnically diverse students. An increase in diverse faculty and administration is suggested to create a more positive image of psychology programs for minorities as well as increase the opportunity for an ethnically diverse student body to have role models who are also ethnically diverse. Casteel (2000), however, found that African American middle school students did not have a preference between Caucasian and African American teachers. Hilton, Russell, and Salmi (1995) found that the race of a clinical supervisor (a specialized type of teacher) was not important to the supervisee, and that instead, the interpersonal skills of the supervisor were more important. The relationship between the presenter and the audience can be thought of as a teaching relationship since the presenter is providing information to the audience. The relationship may also be similar to a supervisor/supervisee relationship. This information may be of particular interest in school psychology since the vast majority of school psychologists are Caucasian.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The recruitment of diverse individuals into the field of school psychology is important so that the ethnic background of practicing school psychologists is more representative of the

students attending public schools. Recruiting diverse graduate students is a first step in this process. The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of providing information in changing the career perceptions of African American undergraduate students. In particular, this study's main purpose is to see if there is a difference in African American undergraduate students' interest in school psychology as a future career choice when the presenter of an information session about a career in school psychology is Caucasian. The information provided by this study may be useful in identifying effective recruitment methods to increase diversity in the field.

### *Research Questions*

1. Does receiving information about school psychology increase African American undergraduate students' interest in school psychology as a career choice?
2. What are the top 5 career domains that African Americans perceive school psychology can provide in a career as assessed by the post-intervention survey?
3. Is there a difference in mean score of each career domain as assessed by the pre-intervention survey versus post-intervention survey?
4. When compared with Waite's (2007) results, is there a difference in African American undergraduates' interest in school psychology when the race of the presenter of an information session about school psychology is Caucasian instead of African American?

### *Definitions*

1. Career domain: A career domain is a characteristic of a job that is related to job satisfaction. There are 19 career domains measured by a five point Likert-scale rating (Questions 17-35 on the pre-intervention survey and Questions 1-19 on the post-

intervention survey). The ratings are used to assess the degree to which participants believe school psychology can offer basic career satisfactions.

- a. Use Abilities: The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities.
- b. Accomplishment: The feelings of accomplishment I get from the job.
- c. Stay Busy: Being able to keep busy all the time.
- d. Advancement: The chance for advancement on this job.
- e. Tell Others What To Do: The chance to tell other people what to do.
- f. Policies: The way company policies are put into practice.
- g. Pay vs. Work: My pay and the amount of work I do.
- h. Co-worker relationships: The way my co-workers get along with each other.
- i. Try Own Methods: The chance to try own methods of doing the job.
- j. Work Alone: The opportunity to work alone on the job.
- k. Maintain Conscience: Being able to do things that don't go against my conscience.
- l. Praise From Work: The praise I get from doing a good job.
- m. Use Own Judgment: The freedom to use my own judgment.
- n. Help Others: Chance to do things for others.
- o. Be Somebody: Opportunity to be somebody.
- p. Boss' Behavior: Way the boss handles employees.
- q. Supervisor Competence: Competence of the supervisor in making decisions.
- r. Variety in Duties: Chance to do different things occasionally.
- s. Work Environment: The working conditions.

2. Interest in School Psychology: Score on a five point Likert-scale rating of participant interest in school psychology as a career on the pre-intervention (Item 37) and post-intervention survey (Item 22).
3. Information Session/Intervention: A thirty-minute presentation about school psychology: what school psychologists do, where school psychologists work, how to become a school psychologist and the benefits of becoming a school psychologist. The information session also includes a question and answer session.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions of school psychology may vary with the amount of exposure and information one has regarding a career in school psychology. An increase in the dissemination of information regarding the roles of a school psychologist, the high job satisfaction rates associated with a career in school psychology, and an enhancement of recruitment strategies directed towards African Americans may facilitate diverse individuals increased interest in the field. This could decrease the current shortage of school psychologists while filling available positions with more diverse members of society.

### *Perceptions of School Psychology*

Oftentimes school psychologists are confused with guidance counselors or school counselors by the community in which they work and by the teachers and students with whom they work (Davis, McIntosh, Phelps & Kehle, 2004). This indicates uncertainty among those who work with school psychologists pertaining to the functions, roles, and utility of a school psychologist. Perhaps information about school psychology addressing these uncertainties could increase positive perceptions of the field, which in turn could increase interest in the field as a profession.

Gilman and Medway (2007) surveyed 1,553 regular education and special education teachers across four different states to assess their perceptions of school psychologists and the services that they offer. Survey questionnaires included Likert-scale ratings on the following items: a) frequency of school psychology services utilized by teachers during a year, b) perceived knowledge of school psychology, c) perceived helpfulness of school psychology services to children and educators, d) satisfaction of school psychological services to children and teachers, e) frequency of following recommendations provided in a psychological report, and

f) helpfulness of a report's recommendations. Lower ratings suggest poorer perceptions of school psychologists and their services. Special education teachers utilize the services offered by school psychologists more frequently than regular education teachers. Regular education teachers rated themselves lower in the categories of perceived knowledge of school psychology, perceived helpfulness of school psychology services to teachers, and satisfaction with school psychological services than special education teachers. The more IEP meetings the school psychologist attends, the more helpful the school psychologist is perceived as being (Arivett, Rust, Brissie, & Dansby, 2007). These lower ratings may be related to the lack of contact that regular education teachers have with school psychologists. Both special and regular education teachers serve as possible recruits into the school psychology profession. Because of their experience within in the school system they would be valuable members in the school psychology profession.

Gilman and Handwerk (2001) surveyed 622 undergraduate students majoring in various areas. The survey was conducted in order to gather information regarding student's perceptions of clinical, counseling, school, social, neurological, industrial/organizational, developmental, educational, experimental, and sport psychology. Students were asked to rate their knowledge of these psychology disciplines and to identify the sources of information about each of the disciplines. Undergraduate students rated themselves as being more knowledgeable about school psychology than clinical psychology and with each additional year in school (i.e. Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior) students perceived themselves as knowing more about both disciplines. Graves and Wright (2009) also found similar results and state that the increase in knowledge with each additional year in school is related to the greater exposure and the researching of graduate programs that students may be interested in attending. Although students rated themselves as knowing more about school psychology than clinical psychology the mean

ratings indicate that students range from having almost no knowledge to only being somewhat knowledgeable about the discipline (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001). The most common way that undergraduate students learned about school psychology was through personal experiences such as meeting a school psychologist. Participants indicated whether or not they had plans of applying to a graduate program, which discipline they were interested in, and to select the roles that each of the disciplines engaged in. The students who were interested in attending a graduate program were most likely to apply to a clinical psychology program, followed by a counseling psychology program, and then a school psychology program. The reasons participants provided for the increased interest in clinical and counseling psychology above school psychology is the desire to work with children and their families. Undergraduate psychology students also perceived clinical psychologists as being more involved in therapy with individuals, assessment, consultation, and research activities than their school psychology counterparts. These findings suggest that while undergraduates perceive that they are more knowledgeable about school psychology than clinical psychology, the actual knowledge of school psychologist's roles and functions are somewhat inaccurate. The lack of available information about school psychology may lead to these inaccurate perceptions. The availability of information about school psychology may lead to more accurate perceptions and an increase in interest in the field.

Students were least interested in school psychology when compared with clinical psychology, counseling psychology, forensic psychology, and criminal profiling (Stark-Wroblewski, Wiggins, & Ryan, 2006). A lack of interest may be related to the lack of awareness that a doctoral degree in school psychology can be an accredited program by the APA and that a degree in school psychology is able to provide the option to be a licensed health service provider.

Making this information readily available to students may increase their interest in school psychology as a profession and make the profession more appealing to students.

The perceived knowledge of a school psychologist's roles and functions, the perceived helpfulness of the school psychologist, and interest in school psychology vary among members of school staff, community members, and undergraduate students. The importance of these roles also varies among school staff. It appears that limited exposure to the field of school psychology relates to the limited interest in the field and lower ratings of perceived helpfulness for school psychologists. The lack of knowledge about school psychologists and their services may contribute to a more negative perspective regarding school psychology. Perhaps with a better understanding of school psychology as a career option and an increase in information regarding a career in school psychology, perceptions of school psychology will be more positive. A more positive perception of the career may lead to an increased interest in the field as a profession.

#### *Information, Interest and Career Decision Making*

There are a number of career theories that exist in the literature base, all aiming to explain the process of successfully matching an individual to a career. All of these theories share three key factors as described by Parsons (1909). The three key factors when making career choices include understanding oneself, gathering information and attaining knowledge of diverse occupations, and the ability to draw relationships between the first two factors. Therefore, to recruit members into a specific career, the information regarding that career must be available and relevant.

Devaney and Hughey (2000) surveyed minority college students and found that 79% of African Americans and 75% of Hispanics reported that they would seek more career information if they could start their careers over again. The Gallup Organization (1999) surveyed adults 18

years of age and older in the United States via telephone and found that seven in ten adults report that if they were looking for a new job, they would try to get more information about jobs and career options open to them than they got the first time. Non-Whites were found to be more likely than Whites to report needing help finding a job in the job market. This information can come from a multitude of sources such as publications, media, instructional materials, computer software, people, simulated situations, visits, work experience, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training (McCormac, 1989). The Gallup Organization reports that 42% of adults used print media and television to get information about jobs and careers, 16% used a career information center in a college, 13% used the public library and Internet, and 35% use friends, relatives, or associates. Government publications are frequently utilized sources of career information and include titles such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010a) and *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010b) (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). Career counselors can also impart occupational information on their clients through directly presenting the information to them, by shaping the client to gather the information on their own, or through computerized occupational information systems (Crites, 1976; The Gallup Organization, 1999). The Gallup Organization reports that one in five adults surveyed reported visiting a counselor or other career specialist to learn about available career choices and that 83% of those who visited a counselor found them to be somewhat helpful or very helpful.

Buikstra, Eley, and Hindmarsh (2007) surveyed and interviewed participants involved in a career information workshop to determine the factors influencing participant's career decisions and subject area selection in college. Nearly 50% of the undergraduates rated the career information workshop as being the highest contributing factor or a high contributing factor influencing their course decisions. Perhaps career information workshops regarding school

psychology could be a useful tool to increase undergraduate student's interest in the profession. University students were surveyed to assess contextual factors influences on career decisions (Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld, Earl, 2005). Participants indicated most frequently that parents and information obtained through the university had the largest impact on their career decisions. Print media and Internet sources were also frequently noted as being influential to the student's career decisions. Career information works to guide the career decision-making process. Accessing available information impacts the user's future decisions regarding career choice. Ensuring that information about school psychology is available through these multiple resources increases the likelihood that individuals will gain knowledge about the field.

Special populations in the United States often require more attention to career development than majority groups. Five proactive career development strategies aimed at assisting ethnic minorities include: enhancement of the self-concept, better information distribution, better and more helpful assessment, more direct help in decision making, and development of culturally relevant career guidance materials (McDavis & Parker, 1981). Developing and distributing information that specifically targets minority students can help expand minority student's awareness of available careers.

Rodriguez (1994) created a brochure including an appealing introduction that motivates the reader to continue reading, a question and answer section that defines important sections of the brochure (i.e. why choose the profession, what does a professional in the particular field do, how to become a professional in that field, etc.), and concise, well written information enhanced by colorful images and graphics. The brochure also included life stories from professionals practicing in the field of interest. Surveys were distributed to a diverse sample of students that aimed to gather demographic information and a rating of utility regarding the brochure. Ninety-

two percent of students reported gaining a more clear understanding of what was required to enter the field of interest, 86% would recommend the brochure to another student, and that each of the sections of the brochure were rated as being useful by between 71% and 90.5% of the students surveyed (Rodriguez). Producing career information resources and widely disseminating the information will aid individuals in making an educated career decision.

Many variables exist that influence one's career choice. For example, parents' beliefs about careers and expectations for their children, peer perception, involvement in activities that are related to a specific career, and the intrinsic value or interest one has in a career (Jacobs, Finken, Griffin, Wright, 1998). Some research suggests that the role of interest in career choice serves as the largest influence as to whether or not one chooses to pursue a specific career (Morgan, Isaac & Sansone, 2001). When an individual is interested in a subject they are more likely to pursue study in that subject area (Jacobs et al., 1998). Increasing access to information about a career may lead to an increase in interest in that career. With this increase in perceived interest, a greater likelihood of one choosing that specific career exists.

### *Roles of the School Psychologist*

Understanding the many roles of a school psychologist may increase the public's interest in school psychology. Increasing the public's interest in school psychology expands the available recruitment pool to reduce the shortage of school psychologists. Symonds (1942) reviews the work of his predecessors and describes the functions of a school psychologist in the mid-1920s. These functions include directing group testing, diagnosing and providing therapy to "problem cases", analyzing and resolving "problem cases", offering a new perspective concerning problems in education, conducting research, and contributing information to build upon general theory and educational practices. The role of school psychologists from the 1920s to the 1940s

expanded from classification of all students in schools, to concentrating on lower incidence children (i.e. those with mental deficits, cognitive strengths, problem behaviors, atypical personality characteristics), to working with multiple members in a child's ecology to fully understand individual students with respect to their abilities, difficulties, emotions, and personality.

School psychologists currently provide a wide range of services. Depending on the districts in which school psychologist's work and the ratio of students per psychologist, the amount of time spent providing each service varies. The roles of school psychologists include, but may not be limited to, psychoeducational evaluations and reevaluations for special education determination and other educational determination, participation in meetings, report writing, interviewing, consultation, counseling, in service education, and direct and indirect intervention services (Cutis, Walker, Hunley & Baker, 1999; Curtis, Grier & Hunley, 2004). The duties of doctoral and non-doctoral practicing school psychologists can be classified into seven categories; assessment, meetings, direct intervention, indirect intervention, administrative duties, networking, and professional development (Brown, Swigart, Bolen, Hall, & Webster, 1998).

Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, and Hall (2002) surveyed 370 NASP members to assess the background information, professional activities, types of referrals, and other roles and functions less frequently involving the school psychologist. The majority of the school psychologists surveyed spent most of their time involved in assessment activities (46%). Large portions of time were spent providing consultation (16%) and interventions (13%). The remaining portion of school psychologists' time was spent counseling (8%), conferencing (7%), supervising (3%), providing in-service education (2%), researching (1%), parent training (1%), and other (3%). The most frequent type of referrals school psychologists were involved are

reading problems, followed by written expression, task completion, mathematics, conduct, and motivation. Defiance, peer relationships, listening comprehension, oral expression, mental retardation, truancy, and violence were other types of referrals that the school psychologists surveyed reported (Bramlett et al., 2002). The roles of school psychologists are guided by frequently changing laws and regulations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or No Child Left Behind (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Curtis, Hunley & Grier, 2004). Awareness of the variability of job duties and expansive range of services that school psychologists provide may peak interest in the field as a future profession and help retain current practitioners.

#### *Job Satisfaction of School Psychologists*

Job satisfaction among school psychologists is very high. VanVoorhis and Levinson (2006) conducted meta-analyses to assess job satisfaction of school psychologists across eight different studies conducted between 1982 and 1999 that used the Modified Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). The MSQ requires respondents to rate twenty-one items designed to measure the multiple facets of job satisfaction as dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. Over 84% of school psychologists rated themselves as being satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. The facets of their jobs that they were most satisfied with were relationships with coworkers, the opportunity to stay busy and work independently, the opportunity to be of service to others while adhering to moral values. The only facets of job satisfaction that the school psychologists rated themselves as being dissatisfied with was opportunities for advancement and school policies and practices. Levels of job satisfaction among practicing school psychologists have remained relatively consistent with a positive trend over the past twenty-years (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

Worrell, Skaggs, and Brown (2006) found similar results in their study on job satisfaction among school psychologists over a twenty-two year span. Approximately 91% of school psychologists were very satisfied or satisfied with their careers. There was also a decreased level of dissatisfaction among practicing school psychologists over the 22-year span. In 1982 a little over 14% rated themselves as being dissatisfied, in 1992 14% were dissatisfied, and in 2004 only 9% were dissatisfied. Areas of dissatisfaction for school psychologists were the same as the previous studies. A lack of opportunity for advancement and discontent with the school systems' policies and procedures were the areas of highest dissatisfaction.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of School Psychologists*

Lewis, Truscott and Volker (2008) surveyed 124 practicing school psychologists to identify their demographics, school information, job satisfaction, current versus preferred role, and other information. Seventy-one percent of practicing school psychologists were female. A study by Smith (1984) found that only 46% of school psychologists were female, which indicates a large shift in the gender ratio of practicing school psychologists. Lewis et al. found that approximately 89% were Caucasian and 5.6% were African American. Four percent of the sampled school psychologists were Hispanic and 1.6% surveyed reported themselves as "other." The mean age of those participating in the study was approximately 43 years old. Almost 50% of those surveyed were fifty years of age or older (Lewis, Truscott & Volker). Practicing school psychologists are a homogeneous sample consisting mostly of Caucasian females.

While Caucasian females continue to hold the majority title, minority representation in those practicing school psychology and those in school psychology graduate programs has increased slightly. After surveying 162 school psychology-training programs, Zins and Halsell's (1986) findings revealed that 11.5% of the students were minority group members. More recent

findings reported by Reschly (2000) indicate that approximately 17% of school psychology graduate students were minorities in 1998.

### *Diversity in Public Schools*

Public schools in the United States are more diverse today than ever. In October of 1972 almost 78% of students enrolled in public schools were Caucasian, nearly 15% were African American, and only 6% were Hispanic. Only 1.4% of students enrolled in the public school system were labeled as “other”. In 2006, 57% of students were Caucasian, almost 16% were African American, and 20.2% were Hispanic. Asian students accounted for almost 4% of total enrollment, 0.2% were Pacific Islander, 0.7% were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2.7% of students were more than one race (United States, n.d.). In a little over 30 years Caucasian students went from over three quarters of students in public schools to just slightly over half. While African American enrollment has slightly increased over the last thirty years the enrollment of Hispanic students has been the fastest growing minority group in public schools. In 2035 it is estimated that nearly 50% of children will be ethnic or racial minorities, or come from immigrant families (Hernandez, 2004). It is also estimated that by 2050, nearly 50% of the U.S. population will be comprised by people of color (Anderson & Massey, 2001).

Not only has the racial or ethnic background of students in public schools changed, the lifestyle of the current population of students is different as well (Hernandez, 2004). For example, in 1940, only 8% of children lived with one parent. In 2000 this number tripled to 24% of children living with only one parent. Nearly 50% of children at some point in their lifetime will live in a single-parent household. Many households also include relatives such as grandparents or non-relatives such as those boarding a room in the same household. Children of immigrant families are almost two times more likely to live in households that are shared with

relatives or non-relatives. These children also have higher poverty rates than non-immigrant children with the percentages being 21% compared to 14%. Children today are also more likely to live in households where the mother works. Approximately 70% of children have mothers who worked sometime during a one-year period.

While the number of students of ethnic or racial minority backgrounds enrolling in public schools is increasing, so are their numbers in special education. Hosp and Reschly (2003) describe negative labeling effects, segregation of placement, and the presumed ineffectiveness of special education as the three main reasons why disproportionate representation in special education is problematic. African American, Hispanic, Native American and English Language Learners were more likely to be labeled with a “negative” label such as ID or LD than Caucasian students and less likely to be labeled with a “positive” label such as gifted and talented (de Valenzuela, Copeland, Huaqing Qi, & Park, 2006). Also of concern, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and English Language Learners were placed in more segregated settings than Caucasian peers. Minority students have consistently been over-represented in special education. This is of primary concern because it likely represents a lack of educational equity.

#### *Shortage of School Psychologists*

Although job satisfaction rates for school psychologists are high, there remains a shortage of school psychologists in the field. There are more school psychologists in the above forty range than there are in the under forty range (Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2004). During the 1989-1990 school year 39% of school psychologists were in the 31 to 40-age range. This percentage dropped to only 19% in the 1999-2000 school year. The largest percentages of school psychologists in the 1999-2000 school year were ages 41-50 (36%), followed by those ages 51-

60 (28%). School psychologists are growing older and are therefore closer to retirement. With this increase in school psychologists nearing retirement comes an even greater shortage of school psychologists. Curtis, Grier, and Hunley's (2004) projections of the shortage of school psychologists estimate a shortage of 9,000 school psychologists between 2000 and 2010, and significant shortages are expected until at least 2020.

Little and Akin-Little (2004) provide different reasons why a shortage of school psychologists exists. Many of the school psychologists currently in the field are nearing retirement age. As these members retire, more openings will be available for school psychologists, increasing the shortage in the field. Encouragement by NASP and APA to increase the number of faculty with school psychology training programs has increased programs that are accredited by these membership organizations. Little and Akin-Little also state that demands of publication and other duties when in an academic position and the lower level of pay of academic school psychologists versus the higher level of pay for some practitioner positions has contributed to the shortage of academic school psychologists.

Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, and Kehle (2004) state that the shortage of practitioners in the field may be due to public's perception of school psychology and school psychologists, limited visibility in the community and schools in which they work, underexposure of the field in colleges and universities, and a lack of involvement in system wide change efforts. Undergraduates pursuing a degree in psychology get much less exposure to school psychology than to other psychology related professions such as clinical psychology. Davis et al. also state that a lack of involvement in system wide change efforts, such as lobbying, contribute to the shortage of school psychologists. Lobbying for an increase in federal assistance programs such

as loan forgiveness or grants may interest more individuals in attending a school psychology graduate program.

Watkins, Crosby, and Pearson (2001) surveyed the school staff that school psychologist's work with (i.e. regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and support staff) concerning the importance of the roles of a school psychologist as it related to their own school. Special education teachers rated assessment and special education input (i.e. working with IEP teams to determine eligibility or an appropriate plan) as more important than regular education teachers. Consultation, assessment and behavior management roles were more important to elementary staff than to secondary staff. Eighty-two percent of the respondents indicated that they want a school psychologist at their school 5 days per week. Both teacher and administrators indicated wanting the current level of assessment practices to remain the same, but also indicated wanting a wider range of services, potentially requiring an increase in psychological staff (Watkins et al., 2001). If more psychological services are desired in the schools this further increases the shortage of school psychologists and the positions that need to be filled.

#### *Recruitment of School Psychologists*

Curtis, Hunley and Grier (2004) provide multiple strategies to increase the number of individuals into the field of school psychology. One method is by recruiting psychology majors into the field. Because of the surplus of clinical and counseling psychologists, those intending on pursuing a career in clinical or counseling psychology could be introduced to school psychology and the opportunities that exist within the field. Students with psychology related majors (i.e. education, sociology, and social work) could also be introduced to a career in school psychology. Another strategy is to retain those who are currently in the field because of the efficiency of

retaining current members versus recruitment and training for new individuals. Prolonging retirement and lowering attrition rates can contribute to achieving this goal. Hiring those who do not meet standard credentials, such as those who have not finished a school psychology-training program, or reducing credential requirements may be an option for some districts (Curtis et al.).

Davis et al. (2004) suggest more aggressive marketing and increasing the visibility of the profession. Volunteering in the community and loaning skills to those in need will increase community member's knowledge of school psychology and the roles and functions associated with it, while also creating a positive image of the profession. School psychologists can create a positive image in the schools at which they work by partaking in simple activities such as eating lunch with the teachers, attending meetings that are not required, conducting in-service training, making administration very aware of the skills that a school psychologist possesses, leaving forms in teacher mailboxes that can be utilized to access the services a school psychologist provides, and volunteering services that are useful to others. Making the profession more visible and more appealing may assist with the recruitment of those who were previously not aware or interested in school psychology. Focusing on positive aspects of the job such as the possibility of a 9-month contract with a school, the fair salary for the amount of training, and the security of the job, may peak others interest in the field. These authors also suggest exposing college and university students to school psychology by holding faculty and practitioners responsible for educating those interested in a professional psychology career.

Most students' knowledge about school psychology comes from personal experience with a school psychologist (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001). Students gained most of their knowledge about clinical and counseling psychology through textbooks, posters, the Internet, employment

and specific courses (Graves & Wright, 2009). Therefore, taking a more active role in marketing may increase others awareness of school psychology and be a potential recruiting method.

Little and Akin-Little (2004) address the potential recruitment efforts of academic school psychologists. A two-component strategy to keep more school psychologists in the professorate is suggested and includes offering financial support and mentoring. Providing graduate assistantships, scholarships, grants, stipends, and tuition remission to students will enable them to make it through the graduate program without becoming burdened with loans. Limiting the amount of loans necessary for students will discourage them from seeking practitioner positions that usually provide more money. Having professors that serve as strong mentors and appear to enjoy their faculty positions and research agendas can encourage students to pursue a career in academia upon graduation. Faculty at historically black colleges and universities were less familiar with school psychology and less enthusiastic about the profession than other psychology disciplines because of the belief that school psychology provided less of an opportunity for success for African American students (Graves & Wright, 2009). Increasing faculty enthusiasm and providing accurate information about the shortage of school psychologists, especially minority school psychologists, could prove to be a successful recruitment strategy.

#### *Recruitment of Ethnic Minority School Psychologists*

The shortage of school psychologists in general is a serious one, however, the shortage of minority school psychologists is even more severe (Davis et al., 2004). Currently, the majority of school psychologists are Caucasian females (Lewis et al., 2008). It is estimated that by the year 2050 nearly 50% of the U.S. population will be people of color (Anderson & Massey, 2001).

With increased numbers of students from minority groups there comes increased diversity of languages and cultural barriers (Sue & Zane, 1987). Myers, Echemendia, and

Trimble (1991) advocate for the modification of current treatment approaches to be more culturally appropriate, the hiring of culturally diverse psychologists to serve as a cost effective way to overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers between psychologist and client, and the need to revamp the curriculum to train all psychologists to meet the needs of a diverse variety of backgrounds.

Zhou et al. (2004) suggest using informal presentations, contacting a diverse group of individuals personally, and advertising the program quality, faculty, and financial resources available to students to increase the numbers of applicants for school psychology programs. Having faculty members in school psychology training programs that are more representative of the U.S. population and offering APA and NASP accredited programs can attract more applicants. Increasing the overall number of applicants will also increase the number of minorities applying to programs, providing the opportunity for a more heterogeneous sampling of school psychologists. Financial supports can also improve the percentage of diverse member's interest in school psychology programs. For example, tuition waivers, graduate assistantships, grants, scholarships, loans, contracts, and medical insurance provide incentives for more minorities to attend a school psychology program. Linking diverse students who show interest in the program with other diverse students who are previously or currently successful in the program may also offer the opportunity for a more representative sampling of students. Rogers and Molina (2006) suggest having more faculty of color in the department looking to recruit African American students.

McHolland, Lubin and Forbes (1990) review the frequent problems associated with the recruitment of minority students into schools of professional psychology. While these authors discuss issues in particular with the recruitment of minorities into clinical doctoral programs, the

same problems can be associated with other professional psychology programs. Minority students who are quality academic matches for professional psychology programs are typically more interested in law and business programs rather than social and behavioral sciences programs because of the quick return of economic rewards and the more positive image these types of programs represent to many minority groups. Traditionally minority communities use churches, families, and organizations related to their culture as emotional and social support systems. Because of this, going to outside sources, such as a psychologist, for support is looked down upon, and psychology has attained a negative image. Oftentimes, minority groups wait until conditions are severe and debilitating before they pursue mental health services and at this point the services received may be less desirable. In order to recruit qualified undergraduates into professional psychology programs, the program must overcome the negative perceptions that are commonly held by minority groups, the negative perception that many undergraduate faculty have pertaining to professional psychology programs, the absence of diverse faculty and student role models in these programs, and the availability of more financial resources that are typically available to students attending law or business programs.

McHolland et al. (1990) suggest many strategies to recruit minority members to professional psychology programs. Some of these incentives are to offer multiple financial resources, marketing and advertisement, faculty and staff that are minorities, and a curriculum that is revised to represent the importance of culturally competent practices. Vaughn (1990) suggests focusing on increasing the amount of ethnic diversity among faculty and administration before actively recruiting a more diverse sampling of students. These faculty, staff, and administrators can serve as role models and support systems to minority students as well as aid in creating a more positive image of professional psychology programs to minorities.

Previous authors suggest the creation of outreach programs between historically Black colleges and universities and school psychology graduate programs (Graves & Wright, 2009; Rogers & Molina, 2006). This may include sending membership packets and posters with information about school psychology to these schools. Active recruitment at historically black colleges and universities into school psychology programs might also increase the diversity of the applicant pool and in return increase the diversity of school psychology practitioners and faculty.

## CHAPTER III: METHOD

### *Participants*

Twenty-five African American students from a large, public university in North Carolina participated in the study (see Table 1). Potential participants were identified from a list of African American declared and intended psychology majors provided by the university's psychology department. Participants were also recruited through the university's psychology department experiment manager system. The mean age was 22.48 years with a range of 18 to 57 years. Four percent of participants were freshman in college, 16% were sophomores, 28% were juniors and 52% were seniors. Twenty-three participants were female and 2 were male. Fifty-two percent reported a grade point average in the 3.0 to 4.0 range and 48% reported a grade point average in the 2.0 to 2.9 range on a 4.0 scale. Participants earned a mean of approximately 37 credit hours in psychology.

### *Instrumentation*

Participants completed a pre-intervention survey (see Appendix A) and a post-intervention survey (see Appendix B). The pre-intervention survey was administered prior to a 30-minute career information session (see Appendix C). The pre-intervention survey identified demographic information, prior experiences in public schools, exposure to school psychologists, obstacles to attending graduate school, familiarity with a variety of fields in psychology, 19 questions assessing the perceived ability of a career in school psychology to meet career needs, consideration of school psychology as a career and amount of interest in school psychology as a career. The post-intervention survey, administered immediately after a 30-minute career information session, assessed participants' perceptions of how well a career in school psychology would be able to fulfill future career expectations, and the participants' level of

Table 1

*Demographic and Educational Characteristics*


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Age		Mean 22.48	Range 18 – 57
Psychology Credit Hours Earned		Mean 36.66	Range 3 – 140
Years in College		Frequency	Percentage
	Freshman	1	4%
	Sophomore	4	16%
	Junior	7	28%
	Senior	13	52%
GPA			
	Below 2.0	0	0%
	2.0-2.9	12	48%
	3.0-4.0	13	52%
Experience in Public School			
	Very Negative	0	0%
	Somewhat Negative	0	0%
	Neither Positive or Negative	3	12.5%
	Somewhat Positive	17	70.8%
	Very Positive	4	16.7%

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interest in school psychology as a career. Open-ended questions concerning the perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a school psychologist were included in the post-intervention survey. The pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys included a 19-item career domain section as a means of assessing the perceived ability of school psychology to fulfill participants' occupational needs.

### *Procedure*

Potential participants were identified from a list of African American declared or intended psychology majors provided by the university's psychology department. Participants identified on the list of were recruited through e-mail (see Appendix D) and telephone (see Appendix E). The e-mail provided a brief explanation of the study, potential dates for the 30-minute career information session, and incentives for attending the information session. Undergraduate psychology students were also asked to volunteer their participation through the university's psychology department experiment management system.

Students who chose to participate were provided with an informed consent form and then completed a pre-intervention survey. Immediately following, participants were involved in a 30-minute career information session that included information about the profession of school psychology (i.e. the goals of school psychology, what school psychologists do, and where school psychologists work). Information concerning how to become a school psychologist and the job satisfaction and benefits of being a school psychologist were included. A question and answer session followed the career information session.

### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics were computed for the participants' demographic characteristics. Plans to attend graduate school, potential factors impacting attaining a graduate education, and

consideration of a career in school psychology were included in the descriptive statistics. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to assess pre-intervention (question 37) and post-intervention (question 22) change in the mean scores on the status of interest in school psychology as a career questions. This addresses whether providing information to African American undergraduate students increases their interest in choosing school psychology as a career.

A mean score was calculated for each of the 19 questions relating to career satisfaction domains. Using the means, data was rank ordered to identify the top 5 career domains students perceive a career in school psychology can provide after receiving information about the profession. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to identify significant changes between the career areas that participants rated a career in school psychology could offer them prior to and after receiving information about the profession. The MANOVA determined if there were differences between the pre-intervention and post-intervention groups across the nineteen domains assessed by corresponding surveys.

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to assess potential group differences between this study's participants and Waite's (2007) participants. The group mean for each study concerning status of interest in school psychology as a career using the pre-information session survey data was compared. An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to assess potential group differences between the group mean found by Waite and the current study's group mean concerning status of interest in school psychology as a career using the post-information session survey data.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### *Experiences in Public School*

Approximately 17% of participants rated their experience in public schools as very positive, 71% rated their experience as slightly positive, and 12% rated their experience as neutral. No participants rated their experience in public schools as negative or slightly negative. Sixty-four percent of participants reported having previously met a school psychologist. Only 20% of participants reported meeting an African American school psychologist.

### *Graduate School*

Participants were asked a series of questions about plans to attend graduate school (see Table 2). Eighty percent of participants reported that they plan to attend graduate school and only 4% reported no plans of attending graduate school. Sixteen percent of participants were unsure as to whether or not they plan to attend graduate school.

Participants rated the impact that financial assistance and additional time spent in school had on their decision to attend graduate school. Thirty-six percent indicated that the availability of financial assistance was a deciding factor when choosing to attend graduate school. Sixteen percent stated that financial assistance was a large factor, 36% indicated that financial assistance was slightly a factor, and 8% reported it being a small factor. Only 4% reported that financial assistance was not a factor when deciding to attend graduate school. Participants rated the impact that additional time in school had on attending graduate school. Sixteen percent of participants reported additional time in school as being a deciding factor. Twenty-four percent reported additional time in school as a large factor. Twenty percent of participants reported that additional time in school was a small factor, 20% reported additional time as slightly a factor, and 20% rated additional time as not a factor.

Table 2

*Factors Related to Graduate School Attendance*


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	Frequency	Percentage
Plan to Attend Graduate School		
Yes	20	80%
No	1	4%
Unsure	4	16%
Discipline		
Psychology	15	60%
Social Work	1	4%
Medical School	1	4%
Other	4	16%
No Response	4	16%
Financial Aid		
Not a Factor	1	4%
Minimal Factor	2	8%
Factor	9	36%
Moderate Factor	4	16%
Deciding Factor	9	36%
Additional Time in School		
Not a Factor	5	20%
Minimal Factor	5	20%
Factor	5	20%
Moderate Factor	6	24%
Deciding Factor	4	16%
School Psychology Career Option		
Yes	8	32%
No	17	68%

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### *Familiarity with Psychology as a Profession*

Participants rated their familiarity with a variety of sub-disciplines in psychology including clinical psychology, counseling psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, and school psychology (see Table 3). Participants were most familiar with clinical psychology and least familiar with I/O psychology. Eight percent of participants rated themselves as very familiar with school psychology and 32% of participants rated themselves as familiar. Forty-eight percent reported being slightly familiar, 8% were not at all familiar, and 4% were unaware of their familiarity with school psychology.

### *School Psychology as a Career Choice*

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted on pre-intervention and post-intervention change in mean of interest in school psychology as a career. This addresses if providing information to African American undergraduate students increases their interest in school psychology as a career. The mean rating of the pre-intervention interest on a scale of 1 to 5 was 2.72 (SD = 1.100). Eight percent of participants reported being very interested in a career in school psychology and 12% reported being fairly interested prior to receiving information about the profession. The mean rating following the information session was 3.36 (SD = 0.995) with 16% reporting being very interested in a career in school psychology and 24% reporting being fairly interested following an information session. Providing information to the participants in this study resulted in a statistically significant change in interest in becoming a school psychologist,  $t(24) = -3.527, p < .05$ , following the career presentation.

Table 3

*Familiarity with Sub-disciplines of Psychology*

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	School Psychology	Clinical Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Industrial/ Organizational Psychology
Very Familiar	8%	24%	20%	4%
Familiar	32%	44%	40%	8%
Slightly Familiar	48%	24%	32%	32%
Not at All Familiar	8%	4%	8%	48%
Don't Know	4%	4%	0%	8%

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### *Top Five Perceived Job Satisfiers*

A mean score was calculated for the 19 questions relating to career satisfaction domains. The mean scores were rank ordered to identify the top 5 career domains participants perceive a career in school psychology can provide prior to and after receiving information about the profession (see Table 4). Post-information session scores were rank ordered to represent the top five career satisfaction domains that participants rated school psychology as providing. Pre-information session scores were rank ordered to display the change in scores from pre- to post information session ratings. The opportunity to help others was rated highest with a post-intervention mean of 4.7600 (SD = 0.43589). The freedom to use ones own judgment was rated second (M = 4.5600, SD = 0.50662). All facets of the work environment (M = 4.5200, SD = 0.65320), the opportunity to perform a variety of tasks (M = 4.5200, SD = 0.77028), and the opportunity to be somebody (M = 4.5200, SD = 0.77028) were tied for third rank. Tied in fourth rank were the opportunity to work alone (M = 4.4800, SD = 0.58585) and the pay for the profession versus the amount of work required (M = 4.4800, SD = 0.58585). Tied in fifth rank was the opportunity to experience feelings of accomplishment (M = 4.4400, SD = 0.58310) and the chance to use ones abilities (M = 4.4400, SD = 0.71181).

### *Perception of Job Satisfiers*

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to identify significant changes in what participants believe a career in school psychology could offer them prior to receiving information about the profession and after receiving information about the profession (see Table 5). Fourteen out of 19 perceptions of career satisfiers increased significantly following the information session.

Table 4

*Pre- and Post-Intervention Rankings of Job Satisfiers*

Career Domain	Pre-Intervention Rank	Post-Intervention Rank	Change in Mean Rating Pre- to Post-Intervention
Use Abilities	6	5	+ 0.8
Accomplishment	4	5	+ 0.76
Stay Busy	5	8	+ 0.41
Advancement	10	11	+ 0.48
Tell Others What To Do	12	13	+ 0.6
Policies	9	8	+ 0.72
Pay vs. Work	9	4	+1.12
Coworker Relationships	2	7	+ 0.4
Try Own Methods	7	6	+ 0.76
Work Alone	9	4	+ 1.12
Maintain Conscience	10	7	+ 0.96
Praise From Work	9	10	+ 0.6
Use Own Judgment	4	2	+ 0.88
Help Others	1	1	+ 0.52
Be Somebody	3	3	+ 0.76
Boss' Behavior	11	12	+ 0.24
Supervisor Competence	10	9	+ 0.72
Variety in Duties	8	3	+ 1.0
Work Environment	6	3	+ 0.88

Table 5

*Changes in Perceptions of Career Domains*

Career Domain	Pre-Intervention Mean	SD	Post-Intervention Mean	SD	<i>F</i>
Use Abilities	3.64	0.95	4.44	0.71	9.90**
Accomplishment	3.68	1.02	4.44	0.58	8.94**
Stay Busy	3.66	1.00	4.08	1.00	2.08
Advancement	3.28	1.24	3.76	1.01	1.74
Tell Others What To Do	2.72	1.17	3.32	1.22	2.46
Policies	3.36	1.08	4.08	0.86	6.29*
Pay vs. Work	3.36	1.11	4.48	0.58	18.66**
Coworker Relationships	3.84	0.94	4.24	0.83	2.06
Try Own Methods	3.60	1.12	4.36	0.90	5.88*
Work Alone	3.36	1.11	4.48	0.58	18.56**
Maintain Conscience	3.28	0.94	4.24	0.92	12.46**
Praise From Work	3.36	1.08	3.96	0.84	5.52*
Use Own Judgment	3.68	1.10	4.56	0.50	11.56**
Help Others	4.24	0.92	4.76	0.44	5.97*
Be Somebody	3.76	1.12	4.52	0.77	6.52**
Boss' Behavior	3.24	1.12	3.48	1.12	0.52*
Supervisor Competence	3.28	1.04	4.00	1.03	5.90**
Variety in Duties	3.52	1.16	4.52	0.77	11.56**
Work Environment	3.64	0.90	4.52	0.65	13.94**

\*Note.  $p < .05$  and \*\*  $p < .01$

### *Influence of Presenter Race on Interest in School Psychology*

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to assess group differences in pre-information ratings between the group mean found by Waite (2007) and this study's group mean for interest in school psychology as a career. There was no statistically significant difference in groups' interest ratings prior to receiving information about school psychology,  $t(54) = 0.53, p > .05$ . An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to assess group differences on post-information session scores between the group mean found by Waite and this study's group mean for interest in school psychology as a career. No statistically significant difference in groups' interest ratings after receiving information about school psychology exists,  $t(54) = 1.38, p > .05$ .

### *Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Becoming a School Psychologist*

Open-ended questions about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of becoming a school psychologist were included in the post-intervention survey (see Table 6). Participants most frequently noted that the flexible schedule, opportunity to help people, steady employment, independence, and benefits were the advantages of being a school psychologist. The most frequently noted disadvantages of becoming a school psychologist were emotional involvement with children, salary, working with difficult children, and working in the school setting.

Table 6

*Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of a Career in School Psychology*

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexible schedule	Workload
Opportunity to help people	Working for a school system
Independence	Salary
Steady employment	Emotional involvement
Working with children	Overwhelming
Increased work privacy	Variety in duties
Mobility between a number of schools	A lot of interaction with people
Receiving good benefits	Lack of relationship with co-workers
Variety in job duties	Lack of appreciation
Job outlook	Paper work
Salary	Difficult children
Using interpersonal and social skills	Lack of ability to travel

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to further understand the role of providing information about school psychology in stimulating the career interest of African American undergraduate students. In particular, the study aims to understand if the race of the presenter providing the information about a career in school psychology impacts participants' interest in school psychology. A better understanding of the role of race in providing information about a career in school psychology to African American undergraduate psychology majors perceptions of school psychology may be useful in the development of effective recruitment strategies that will help increase diversity in the profession of school psychology.

### *Information and Interest in School Psychology*

Prior to the information session nearly 70% of participants in this study indicated they had not considered a career in school psychology, while 20% were interested or very interested in a career in school psychology. Following an information session about school psychology nearly 40% of participants indicated that they were interested or very interested in a career in school psychology. The results of this study are not statistically different than results from a previous study by Waite (2007). Nearly 55% of participants in that study had never considered a career in school psychology and 26% were interested or very interested in school psychology prior to the information session. Following the information session 61% of participants were interested or very interested in a career in school psychology.

Accurate information about careers is a fundamental step in choosing a career (Fossel, 2009; Parsons, 1909; Stewart, 1982). Participation in career specific information sessions or workshops can influence course and career decisions (Buikstra, Eley, & Hindmarsh, 2007) and level of interest in a career (Waite, 2007). Occupations that satisfy personal needs or enhance

self-image are sought-out by the prospective workforce (Stewart, 1982). Students often are not aware of school psychology as a career option (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001; Waite, 2007). Providing information to African American students about school psychology enables these students to consider pursuing a career that will enhance self-image and satisfy personal needs. Although interest alone isn't a guarantee that an individual will pursue a specific career, increased interest in a career boosts the likelihood that an individual will choose a career (Morgan, Isaac & Sansone, 2001).

### *Career Satisfaction Domains*

Participants rated their perception of how well a career in school psychology might satisfy their occupational needs in 19 different domains prior to and after receiving information about school psychology. There were notable changes in perception of school psychology following the information session; participants rated a career in school psychology as better able to meet all 19 facets of career satisfaction. Fourteen of the 19 career satisfaction domains showed a statistically significant increase between the pre- and post-information sessions. The top ten career satisfaction domains for which the mean increased at a statistically significant level were (1) satisfaction with salary, (2) opportunity to work alone, (3) variety in job duties, (4) not having to violate conscience at work, (5) opportunity to use own judgment, (6) all facets of the work environment, (7) chance to use abilities, (8) experience feelings of accomplishment, (9) the opportunity to be somebody, (10) and supervisor's competence.

Previous studies found that providing career information influences career perceptions. Buikstra, Eley and Hindmarsh (2007) surveyed college students who completed a career information workshop and found that 50% of participants rated the workshop as being a high or the highest contributing factor influencing their course selection decision. Participants in a

previous study of African American undergraduates found a statistically significant increase in perceived satisfaction in 14 of the 19 career satisfaction domains for a career in school psychology (Waite, 2007). Participants' limited knowledge about school psychology prior to the information session likely limited their understanding as to whether a career in school psychology could meet their occupational needs. Information about the profession resulted in a greater percentage of students that believed school psychology was able to satisfy their occupational needs. If these changes lead to an increase in the number of African American students who pursue school psychology as a career option, then school psychology information sessions directed towards ethnic minority students may be an effective technique to recruit more diverse individuals into the field.

Participants were also asked to rate the degree to which they believed a career in school psychology could meet 19 domains related to career satisfaction. The mean score for each of the domains were rank ordered. The highest 5 domains include:

1. opportunity to help others
2. freedom to use own judgment
3. variety in job duties, satisfaction with working conditions, opportunity to be somebody
4. the opportunity to work alone, satisfaction with salary
5. sense of accomplishment, and the chance to use abilities

Waite (2007) found that the highest 5 domains participants believed a career in school psychology could offer were:

1. employment security, the opportunity to help others
2. involvement in activities that are consistent with moral values
3. chance to try own work methods

4. the chance to use abilities
5. and a sense of accomplishment

The results of this study and the results in Waite's study are very similar. This suggests that there is a similar core of career domains that African American undergraduates participating in these studies believe a career in school psychology can satisfy.

There is a large overlap between what participants in these studies perceive a career in school psychology can offer and what previous research has reported African Americans in general seek in a career. Lyons and O'Brien (2006) found that in general African Americans look for careers in which they can stay busy, have independence, variety in job duties, adequate compensation, security in a career, opportunity for advancement and receive recognition. Four of the six areas that Lyons and O'Brien found were important to African Americans were ranked in the highest 5 career satisfaction domains in both the current study and Waite's 2007 study. The likelihood of attaining career satisfaction increases as the match between what individuals desire in a career and what individuals gain out of a career increases (Fossel, 2009; Parsons, 1909; Stewart, 1982). A career in school psychology seems to offer important components African Americans are likely to seek in a career. This information may be useful to African American students who are considering a career in school psychology.

#### *Presenter Race*

Students' interest in school psychology increased significantly following an information session presented by a Caucasian graduate student. Results were not significantly different than that of Waite's study (2007), which utilized an African American graduate student as the presenter. Although some research suggests that a presenter from the same race might be a more effective influence on career perceptions (Rodriguez, 1994; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004), other

research in education-related settings found different results. Hilton, Russell, and Salmi (1995) found, for example, that the race of a students' clinical supervisor did not influence the person being supervised. The most influential factor impacting supervisees' perceptions of supervisors was interpersonal skills (i.e. supportive environment, ability to relate). Casteel (2000), in a study with 160 African American students, found there was no preference for either African American or Caucasian instructors.

The race of the presenter of school psychology information sessions does not seem to differentially affect participants' interest in or perceptions about school psychology. Students' participating in a career information session about school psychology had similar perceptions of the profession whether the presenter of the information was African American or Caucasian. As suggested by Hilton, Russell, and Salmi (1995), it may be that race of the presenter is not important an influence on perceptions of the profession as might be other factors, such as the perceived interpersonal skills of the presenter.

### *Implications for the Profession*

Public school children come from increasingly diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). The vast majority of practicing school psychologists, however, are Caucasian women (Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2004; Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, & Kehle, 2004; Little & Akin-Little, 2004). Although school psychology practitioners are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs and school psychology is a fairly well paying profession, there are currently not enough trained school psychologists to fill all the available positions in the United States (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). The challenge to the profession of school psychology is not only to increase the overall number of trained school psychologists to

fill these vacancies, but also to increase the number of school psychologists from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

An important first step in training a more diverse group of psychologists is to recruit more students from diverse ethnic backgrounds into graduate programs. Individual school psychology graduate programs are usually responsible for recruiting students into their perspective programs. One perspective has held that the availability of ethnic minority role models in school psychology is a critical means of increasing the recruitment of diverse individuals into school psychology (Graves & Wright, 2009) because students prefer career role models of a similar race as themselves (Rodriguez, 1994; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004). Increasing the number of ethnically diverse faculty has been suggested as a method of recruiting to aid in the recruitment of a diverse student body (McHolland, 1990; Vaughn, 1990). Ethnically diverse faculty members serve as a career role model and support system to students of a similar ethnic background. The fact that practicing school psychologists and faculty in school psychology graduate programs are still overwhelmingly Caucasian, however, limits this strategy as an immediate solution to the recruitment issue.

Receiving information about school psychology enhanced participants' realistic perceptions of school psychology's ability to satisfy career domains. The current study, along with the results of Waite (2007), provide evidence that the race of a presenter may be less of a factor in increasing the interest of African American students in school psychology careers that might have previously been thought. Since career information sessions seem to increase interest in school psychology careers among African American undergraduates, school psychology graduate programs are urged to provide career information to African American undergraduates to stimulate interest in a career in school psychology. The programs can do so with some

confidence in its strategy without having to rely solely on ethnic minority faculty or students as recruiters.

Over a period of 22 years more than 90% of school psychologists report being very satisfied or satisfied with their careers (Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). Practicing school psychologists report that the most satisfying aspects of their careers are relationships with coworkers, opportunity to stay busy, opportunity to work independently, opportunity to help others, and the ability to adhere to moral values (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). Career satisfaction domains that African Americans perceive that a career in school psychology can provide are very similar to the areas that practicing school psychologists describe as the most satisfying aspects of their jobs. Because of the overlap between what African Americans desire from a career and the realistic perspective of what school psychology can offer, a career in school psychology may be a good career choice. Providing career information is an effective tool to pique African American students' interest in school psychology as a profession and can be a good first step to recruit diverse individuals into the field. More aggressive advertising and increasing the visibility of the profession can increase interest in school psychology (Davis et al., 2004). Interest in graduate study, however, is only one step in recruiting individuals into a graduate program. A lack of financial resources is a barrier to attending graduate school for many African American students (Graves & Wright, 2009; McHolland, Lubin & Forbes, 1990; Zhou et al., 2004).

### *Implications for Future Research*

Future research should examine whether providing information to other underrepresented groups in school psychology (such as Latinos, Asian Americans, or males) increases their interest in the field. Future research should also explore utilizing more cost and time effective

means of disseminating information in addition to face-to-face information sessions (i.e. electronic presentations, informational pamphlets and brochures). Researchers might also study how to convert student interest in a career into actual program enrollment. Finally, it may be of interest to further explore the role of a presenter's perceived level of interpersonal skills in creating interest in the profession.

### *Limitations*

One limitation of this study is its small sample size. Although the sample size is small, it represents nearly half of the total number of African American majors in the psychology department at the institution in which the study took place. A limitation that also affects the generalizability of the findings is that all participants are from a single public university in North Carolina. Results from this study may be different from results of another study conducted elsewhere in the United States. These limitations should be borne in mind as one considers the application of these results.

### *Conclusion*

Providing information about school psychology to African American undergraduate students increases their expressed interest in the profession. Accurate information also increases their perception that a career in school psychology can meet multiple career satisfaction domains. Career domains that participants believed a career in school psychology provides match what practicing school psychologists find most satisfying about their careers. Therefore, it appears that a career in school psychology would be a satisfying one for many of the students in this study.

An overwhelming majority of school psychology faculty and graduate students are Caucasian. African American and Caucasian presenters who provided information sessions on school psychology careers have similar impacts on the level of participant interest in school

psychology. Utilizing current school psychology faculty and students to provide information sessions to African American students appears to be an effective tool to increase interest in school psychology as a profession. Increasing ethnically diverse students' interest in school psychology may increase the enrollment of ethnically diverse school psychology graduate students and eventually, practicing school psychologists.

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APPENDIX A  
Pre-intervention Survey

Demographics

1. Educational Level:
 

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
----------	-----------	--------	--------
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Major:
 

Psychology	Other: _____
------------	--------------
4. Overall GPA:
 

4.0-3.0	2.9-2.0	Below 2.0
---------	---------	-----------
5. Number of Credit Hours in Psychology: \_\_\_\_\_
6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being really negative and 5 being very positive) rate your experience as a student in public school.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
7. Have you ever met a school psychologist?      Yes    No
8. Have you ever met an African American school psychologist?    Yes    No
9. Do you plan to attend Graduate School:    Yes    No    Unsure
10. In what discipline are you likely to attend graduate school? \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not a factor and 5 being a deciding factor) based on the impact they have on your decision to attend graduate school.

- |                                     |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Financial Support               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Additional Time Spent in School | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

On a scale of 1 to 4 rate your familiarity with these fields of psychology:

- |  | Don't Know | Not At Familiar | Slightly Familiar | Familiar | Very Familiar |
|--|------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 13. Clinical Psychology                  | 1          | 2               | 3                 | 4        | 5             |
| 14. Counseling Psychology                | 1          | 2               | 3                 | 4        | 5             |
| 15. School Psychology                    | 1          | 2               | 3                 | 4        | 5             |
| 16. Industrial Organizational Psychology | 1          | 2               | 3                 | 4        | 5             |

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5, based on how well you think school psychology as a career can meet can meet the following career satisfactions for you:

1 = Not At All

2 = Slightly

3 = Fairly Well

4 = Very Well

5 = Extremely Well

17. The chance to use my abilities	1	2	3	4	5
18. Feelings of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5
19. Being able to stay busy all the time	1	2	3	4	5
20. Chances for advancement on the job	1	2	3	4	5
21. The chance to tell other people what to do	1	2	3	4	5
22. Satisfaction with company policies	1	2	3	4	5
23. My pay and the amount of work I do	1	2	3	4	5
24. Relationships with co-workers	1	2	3	4	5
25. The chance to try own work methods	1	2	3	4	5
26. The opportunity to work alone	1	2	3	4	5
27. Not having to violate conscience at work	1	2	3	4	5
28. Praise received from work done	1	2	3	4	5
29. Freedom to use my own judgment	1	2	3	4	5
30. The chance to do things for others	1	2	3	4	5
31. The opportunity to be “somebody”	1	2	3	4	5
32. Way the boss handles employees	1	2	3	4	5
33. Competence of supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
34. The chance to do different things occasionally	1	2	3	4	5
35. All facets of the work environment	1	2	3	4	5
36. Have you considered a career in school psychology?	Yes	No			

37. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not interested at all and 5 being very interested) how interested you are in a career in school psychology?

1      2      3      4      5

APPENDIX B  
Post-intervention survey

Based on what you now know about school psychology rate the following dimensions of job satisfaction from 1 to 5, on how well you think the profession can meet the following career satisfactions for you:

1 = Not At All

2 = Slightly

3 = Fairly Well

4 = Very Well

5 = Extremely Well

1. The chance to use one's abilities	1	2	3	4	5
2. Feelings of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5
3. Being able to stay busy all the time	1	2	3	4	5
4. Chances for advancement on the job	1	2	3	4	5
5. The chance to tell other people what to do	1	2	3	4	5
6. Satisfaction with company policies	1	2	3	4	5
7. My pay and the amount of work I do	1	2	3	4	5
8. Relationships with co-workers	1	2	3	4	5
9. The chance to try own work methods	1	2	3	4	5
10. The opportunity to work alone	1	2	3	4	5
11. Not having to violate conscience at work	1	2	3	4	5
12. Praise received from work done	1	2	3	4	5
13. Freedom to use own judgment	1	2	3	4	5
14. The chance to do things for others	1	2	3	4	5
15. The opportunity to be "somebody"	1	2	3	4	5
16. Way the boss handles employees	1	2	3	4	5
17. Competence of supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
18. The chance to do different things occasionally	1	2	3	4	5
19. All facets of the work environment	1	2	3	4	5

20. What do you think are the advantages of being a school psychologist?

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21. What do you think are the disadvantages of being a school psychologist?

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22. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not interested at all and 5 being very interested) how interested you are in a career in school psychology?

1      2      3      4      5

## APPENDIX C

### Outline of Information Session Presentation

- I. What Is School Psychology?
  1. School psychologists help all children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.
- II. What Do School Psychologists Do?
  1. Assessment
  2. Consultation
  3. Intervention
  4. Counseling
- III. Where Do School Psychologists Work?
  1. Elementary School
  2. Middle School
  3. High School
  4. Office Based vs. School Based
  5. Number of Schools
- IV. How Do You Become a School Psychologist?
  1. Must complete a Bachelor's degree
  2. Consider an education or psychology major
  3. Take courses in
    - Child development
    - General and child psychology
    - Statistics, measurement, and research
    - Philosophy and theory of education
    - Instruction and curriculum
    - Special education
  4. Specialist/MACAS: 3 years (60 hours) of full-time training
  5. Doctorate: 5 years or more, plus dissertation
  6. One-year, full-time internship embedded in training programs at both levels. At least half of the internship (600) hours must be completed in a school setting.
- V. What Are the Benefits of Becoming a School Psychologist?
  1. Working schedules
  2. Salary and benefits
  3. Job satisfiers
- VI. Questions & Answers

## APPENDIX D

### Participant Recruitment E-mail

Research Participants Needed for Study of Impact of Career Information on Career Choices of African American Intended/Declared Psychology Majors

- **Attend a 15 to 30 minute career information session and complete two surveys.**
- **Learn about a career option for psychology majors.**
- **Participation will enter you in a raffle for one of two \$15 gift cards of your choice**

Participant sessions are scheduled for the following dates and times:

- **TBA**
- **TBA**
- **TBA**

Want to participate? Just reply to this e-mail and let us know which of these dates and times work best for you!

**The results of this study will help us learn more about career choices of African American students who are intended or declared Psychology majors.**

**If at anytime you have questions, concerns, or change your mind about participation feel free to contact Sarah Raab (graduate student in psychology) at [raabs08@students.ecu.edu](mailto:raabs08@students.ecu.edu)**

## APPENDIX E

### Telephone Recruitment Script

Good (Afternoon, or Evening) Morning my name is Sarah Raab and I am a school psychology graduate student at East Carolina University. I am conducting a study on the impact of career information on career choice for African American undergraduate students. I am calling you because you are a psychology major or intended psychology major at ECU and I would like for you to participate.

To participate all you need to do is attend an information session in which you will be asked to fill out a pre-presentation survey, listen to a 15 to 30 minute career information presentation and fill out a post-presentation survey. You will benefit by learning about a career option that may be of interest to you. You will also be entered into a raffle to win one of two \$15 gift cards to a local restaurant. By participating you will also be contributing to our understanding of career choice that may help others in the future.

We have sessions scheduled for the following dates and times (TBA). Do you think you will be able to attend one of the sessions? At anytime before, during or after the session you can change your mind about your participation. I will also send you an e-mail to confirm your participation for that date. If you have any question or concerns please feel free to contact me at raabs08@students.ecu.edu. Thank you for your time. Have a nice day (evening or night).

# APPENDIX F

## Institutional Review Board Approval Form



**University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board**  
East Carolina University • Brody School of Medicine  
600 Moye Boulevard • Old Health Sciences Library, Room 1L-09 • Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 • Fax 252-744-2284 • [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)  
Chair and Director of Biomedical IRB: L. Wiley Nifong, MD  
Chair and Director of Behavioral and Social Science IRB: Susan L. McCammon, PhD

---

TO: Sarah Raab, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, ECU  
FROM: UMCIRB  
DATE: October 30, 2009  
RE: Human Research Activities Determined to Meet Exempt Criteria  
TITLE: "African American Undergraduates' Perceptions of School Psychology as a Career Option"

### UMCIRB #09-0783

This research study has undergone IRB review on 10/29/09. It is the determination of the IRB Chairperson (or designee) that these activities meet the criteria set forth in the federal regulations for exemption from 45 CFR 46 Subpart A. This human research activity meets the criteria for an exempt status because it is research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects and any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this **unfunded** study **no more than minimal risk**. This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any changes must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review prior to implementation to allow determination that proposed changes do not impact the activities eligibility for exempt status. Should it found that a proposed change does require more substantive review, you will be notified in writing within five business days.

The following items were reviewed in determination exempt certification:

- Internal Processing Form – Exempt Application, (dated 10/16/09)
- Informed Consent (no version date)
- Thesis Proposal/Protocol
- Pre-intervention Survey
- Post-intervention Survey
- Participant Recruitment Email
- Telephone Script
- Outline of Information

It was furthermore determined that the reviewer does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

**The UMCIRB applies 45 CFR 46, Subparts A-D, to all research reviewed by the UMCIRB regardless of the funding source. 21 CFR 50 and 21 CFR 56 are applied to all research studies that fall under the purview of Food and Drug Administration regulations. The UMCIRB follows applicable International Conference on Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice guidelines.**

APPENDIX G

Institutional Review Board Revision Approval Form

UMCIRB #:

UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL CENTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
REVISION FORM

RECEIVED

MAY 14 2010

UMCIRB

UMCIRB #: 09-0783

Date this form was completed: 5/13/2010

Title of research: African American Undergraduates' Perceptions of School Psychology As a Career Option

Principal Investigator: Sarah E. Raab

Sponsor:

Fund number for IRB fee collection (applies to all for-profit, private industry or pharmaceutical company sponsored project revisions requiring review by the convened UMCIRB committee):

Fund	Organization	Account	Program	Activity (optional)
		73059		

Version of the most currently approved protocol:

Version of the most currently approved consent document:

CHECK ALL INSTITUTIONS OR SITES WHERE THIS RESEARCH STUDY WILL BE CONDUCTED:

- East Carolina University       Beaufort County Hospital  
 Pitt County Memorial Hospital, Inc       Carteret General Hospital  
 Heritage Hospital       Boice-Willis Clinic  
 Other

The following items are being submitted for review and approval:

- Protocol: version or date  
 Consent: version or date  
 Additional material: version or date

Complete the following:

- Level of IRB review required by sponsor:  full  expedited
- Revision effects on risk analysis:  increased  no change  decreased
- Provide an explanation if there has been a greater than 60 day delay in the submission of this revision to the UMCIRB. I was unable to recruit enough participants using prior recruitment strategies. Therefore, I needed to add using the psychology department's experiment manager system to gather more participants.
- Does this revision add any procedures, tests or medications?  yes  no If yes, describe the additional information:
- Have participants been locally enrolled in this research study?  yes  no
- Will the revision require previously enrolled participants to sign a new consent document?  yes  no

Briefly describe and provide a rationale for this revision: I will be recruiting participants through the university psychology department experiment manager system. Prior approval by the IRB did not include recruiting participants through this manner. Therefore, I am resubmitting to gain approval of this new recruitment strategy.

Sarah E. Raab      Sarah E. Raab      5/14/2010  
 Principal Investigator Signature      Print      Date

Box for Office Use Only

The above revision has been reviewed by:

Full committee review on \_\_\_\_\_       Expedited review on 5/17/10

The following action has been taken:

Approval for period of 5/17/10 to no expiration  
 Approval by expedited review according to category 45 CFR 46.110  
 See separate correspondence for further required action.

Susan McGannon      Susan McGannon      5/17/10  
 Signature      Print      Date

