

Training Christian Practitioner-Scholars: The Regent University Example

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The doctoral program in clinical psychology (Psy.D.) at Regent University is committed to a practitioner-scholar model of professional training. It has a concurrent and foundational commitment to offering this professional training in a manner congruent with a Christian worldview. Although our training goal is to produce graduates whose primary career is in practice, the program retains an integral investment in promoting their scientific identity. Some specific ways that the crystallized and fluid characteristics of psychological science become inculcated into the program's students are discussed. All students must engage in some form of scholarly productivity to complete their training. While students are not required to perform traditional quantitative research, they must be prepared to critically evaluate this research and to use scientific skills derived from the quantitative tradition in clinical practice. Although not a requirement, 85% of Regent graduates incorporate quantitative research in their dissertations. Nearly 30% of the student body was involved in collaborative research with faculty during the 2003-2004 academic year. The strengths and weaknesses of the Regent model are discussed.

The doctoral program in clinical psychology at Regent University culminates with the award of the Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) degree in that discipline. The initial class of students entered the program in the fall of 1996. Regent University was founded as a graduate institution focused on the training of professionals. Consistent with this emphasis, the focus of the Psy.D. program has been on the training of professional psychologists whose primary career activity will likely consist predominantly of clinical practice. Regent has been heavily guided in its professional training model by its affiliation with the National Council of Schools and Programs of Professional Psychology (NCSPP). Our program received accreditation by the American Psychological Association in 2002.

Regent University Program Training Model

The Regent program is committed to a practitioner-scholar model of clinical training (Buchanan, 2002; Peterson, Peterson, Abrams, & Stricker, 1997). In contrast to pure practitioner programs, we emphasize the importance of a secondary identity for our practitioner graduates: that of a scholar. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a scholar as "one who is taught in a school". The practitioner-scholar or scholar-practitioner labels have been most commonly applied to Vail model programs that deliberately embrace practice as their primary identity (Korchin, 1973).

This is typically contrasted with the Boulder 'scientist-practitioner' model in which clinical psychologists self-identify primarily as scientists who apply clinical psychological science to the context of practice (Trierweiler & Stricker, 1998).

We embrace the scholar label to point out that while our students are not being trained to function primarily as researchers, they are not mere practice *technicians*. One may be a scholar without having any commitment to science in some fields. For instance, a literary scholar is not necessarily a "scientist of literature". But our students are training to be scholars of clinical psychology: a discipline that has a scientific identity as part of its core self-understanding (Stanovich, 2003; Benjamin & Baker, 2004).

Consistent with the rich and influential account of the Psy.D. training model advanced by NCSPP, the goal of the Regent doctoral program is to produce "local clinical scientists" (Trierweiler & Stricker, 1998).

We will return to this topic of how the practitioner-scholar model of training retains a core commitment to a scientific identity below.

There is a third identity we view as central to our training model at Regent. As a Christian institution, we are committed to the outworking of Christian worldview and ethos throughout the professional training of our students. Although orthodox in its Christian commitment, Regent is otherwise varied in its Christian forms. Our faculty reflect a broad spectrum of Protestant and Catholic faith traditions. Renewal traditions are heavily represented at Regent but not in any pre-

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ferred sectarian form. The practitioner-scholar professional training model adopted by our program is subsumed within this broader Christian educational context. The most general statement of our training model therefore could be described as a Christian practitioner-scholar model of training.

Regent Approach to the Integration of Science and Practice

The Regent Psy.D. program is designed to train students to practice in a highly professional manner that is characterized by the science of clinical psychology. There are at least two obvious ways that practice may be scientific. Sciences have both a crystallized dimension (e.g., a set of findings or a knowledge base) and a fluid dimension (e.g., a set of attitudes and skills). Clinical psychological practice may be scientific if it is characterized by application of the crystallized knowledge bases of psychological science or its fluid scientific skills.

Our students must master the standard range of crystallized knowledge bases expected for doctoral clinical psychology programs accredited by the American Psychological Association. This includes graduate study in the general areas of psychological science such as the biological, cognitive, affective, and motivational bases of behavior, quantitative methods, social psychology, cultural diversity and developmental psychology. Our students also must master extensive coursework specific to the specialty of clinical psychology including but not limited to: assessment, psychotherapeutics, community psychology, group therapy, family psychology, clinical child & pediatric psychology, and clinical supervision & consultation. In addition to these required clinical courses, students must also take several clinical electives. This occurs through formal didactic exposure to the extant literature on evidence-based practice in courses, through directed readings in clinical supervision, and from monthly colloquium speakers. Additionally, students are instructed to use psychometrically defensible approaches to assessment, outcome assessment guided approaches to psychotherapy, and best practices approaches to treatment planning (Beutler & Harwood, 2000; Nathan & Gorman, 2002; Norcross, 2002).

It should be noted that while Boulder model programs may place a stronger emphasis on the coursework in quantitative methods, they will rarely require their students to take this full

range of clinical practice courses. Because our faculty emphasize coverage of evidence based practice in each of these courses, it is quite possible that students in Psy.D. programs like Regent receive a stronger didactic exposure to the crystallized science of clinical psychology than do students in programs that place a greater relative priority on the training of researchers.

There are numerous fluid scientific skills that have become associated with clinical psychology. The quantitative-experimental tradition in clinical psychology has provided psychologists with sophisticated skills at inferring causes of human behavior and sensitivity to confounds that result in causal misattributions (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Cook & Campbell, 1979). Other scientific skills inculcated in clinical psychology include: critical thinking, quantitative assessment/evaluation of human functioning, evidenced based hypothesis testing, problem solving skills, balancing parsimony and comprehensiveness, and systemic eliminative induction (Bishop & Trout, 2004). These skills are developed in our students through a combination of focused coursework, course assignments that require students to peruse and critically evaluate psychology journals, participation in research teams, faculty and peer modeling, interaction with prominent psychological scientists in a monthly colloquium series, and by the completion of a dissertation project.

Although our students are not required to become proficient in the conduct of traditional experimental research, they are expected to become competent clinical field scientists. From its inception, clinical psychology was closely identified with the clinical method, a form of field science (Witmer, 1907/1996). Fieldwork is the most common context of science for disciplines such as anthropology, archeology and even some earth sciences (Wolcott, 1995). Even hard science disciplines such as physics and chemistry have their fieldwork components (Kuklich & Kohler, 1996). The overly simplistic division of science into its pure and applied forms ignores the unique contributions of fieldwork to science. The term applied science suggests that science is first developed somewhere else (e.g., the laboratory) and then put to use (applied) in the field. But field scientists often have to innovate on pure science methodologies and extend their sciences in novel ways based on the dynamic and complex features they must confront in the natural world (Cartwright, 1983).

Similarly, we believe that the evidence based practice skills we are inculcating in our students constitute a legitimate scientific activity in its own right (Peterson, et al., 1997). For instance, students are encouraged to think of psychological evaluations as investigations requiring scientific rigor. Their reports should advance pragmatically useful conceptualizations, and conclusions and recommendations that are proportional to the evidence presented in the reports.

Research Training Sequence at Regent

Research training occurs informally throughout curriculum as students encounter and perform critical evaluations of research in each course subject. The formal research training sequence takes place in four required courses. The course sequence is developmental and designed to facilitate the objective of dissertation completion. Students progress from traditionally structured lecture-based material to formulation of an original dissertation topic. The first two courses are Statistics and Research Design which they complete sequentially in their first and second year in the program. Statistics covers typical descriptive statistics and the range of inferential analytic methods appropriate for both between-groups and within subjects designs as well as regression techniques. Students also receive exposure to structural equation modeling and meta-analysis. Content in Research Design is approximately 80% quantitative and 20% qualitative. The quantitative material consists of the presentation of experimental, quasi-experimental, and associational designs. Consistent with an integration focus is the broadening of research strategies to include qualitative methods such as ethnography and grounded theory, as well as ways to content analyze narrative material. For example, a student interested in religious epiphanies in elderly African-Americans is encouraged to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to investigate this somewhat esoteric area. Hence, distinctions between random and purposive sampling and data analysis options are systematically drawn throughout the course duration. A major requirement of the course is an original research proposal that is presented at the end of the course.

The third course is a Dissertation Methodology Seminar. During the fall of their third year, students enroll in this one-credit course to review foundational research strategies and obtain exposure to the variety of available dissertation

options. This course also provides an excellent opportunity to mentor students on administrative procedures, faculty preferences, and dissertation pragmatics. For example, students must propose their dissertations prior to submitting their match list for internship and this is consistently reiterated. Regent faculty are also in agreement that quantitative dissertations should utilize item-level data for analyses and this is another point that is emphasized in this course. The course culminates in presentation of a concept paper which may be viewed as a precursor proposal including literature review, statement of research project, and outline of a proposed methods section. Inherent throughout this course is the idea that students are actively considering possible dissertation topics as well as committee composition.

The final course in the sequence is Dissertation Proposal which is essentially an independent study under the direction of the dissertation chair. In order to pass the course and proceed, the student must submit a Dissertation Topic Approval Form by the end of the semester outlining the dissertation Chair, an approved topic, and finalization of their committee. Students must complete this sequence prior to applying to sit for their doctoral comprehensives.

Dissertation Requirements

Acceptable dissertations are subsumed under seven domains that are consistent with the practitioner-scholar model of training and Christian integration. Students are provided with examples of acceptable projects under each of the following seven headings: True experimental designs; quasi-experimental designs; comparative; associational; expository/descriptive, theoretical/philosophical, and service projects. The latter three domains are viewed as non-traditional dissertations in the sense they do not necessarily involve hypothesis testing and collection/analysis of data. For example, a theoretical/philosophical dissertation may involve a detailed discussion of the implications of Thomistic psychology for integration or an explication of the assumptions about human freedom that are implicit in various legal codes. An example of a service project dissertation would be a program evaluation of Christian interventions within our Psychological Services Center, or development of a web-based outreach service.

Although our students are not required to complete dissertations involving the collection and analysis of quantitative data, most students

Table 1
Dissertation Types Performed by Regent Students from 1996-2004 (N=54)

Dissertation Type	Frequencies			
	Completed by Category		Data Analyzed	
Experiments	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Quasi-experiments	13	(25%)	13	(25%)
Comparative	2	(4%)	2	(4%)
Associational	25	(46%)	25	(46%)
Expository/Descriptive	4	(7%)	2	(4%)
Philosophical/Theoretic	6	(11%)	1	(2%)
Service Project	4	(7%)	2	(4%)

do in fact conduct quantitative studies for dissertations. We encourage students to use methods tailored to answering their research questions (Hathaway, in press). Most students ask questions that imply quantitative hypotheses. Table 1 summarizes the types of dissertation projects completed by our students to date. Only 15% of the dissertations performed by our students have been entirely non-quantitative in their method. Associational and Quasi-Experimental designs constitute over 70% of the dissertations performed in our program by the end of the 2003-2004 academic year. Many student dissertation projects have evolved out of their participation in faculty research teams. Consequently, they have been primed to ask quantitative questions and to use quantitative analyses. While our expository/descriptive category may involve qualitative analyses or case studies, our students are encouraged to complement such procedures with quantitative outcome assessments.

Optional Research Opportunities for Students

Program Expectations

As we have noted, our program does not have a formal requirement for students to engage in research beyond the scholarly productivity required for the dissertation which may be non-quantitative. However, there is an informal expectation that students engage in research as part of their professional development and enhancement of their marketability. Students are encouraged to submit their dissertations for publication. We have added a requirement to the dissertation that students must include a submission ready article as an Appendix to the final dis-

sertation manuscript. Further, most faculty research team activity is geared towards conference presentations and manuscript submission. For example, a project that occurs in the 2003-2004 academic year will likely be submitted for the 2005 Spring Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) conference. Faculty are strategic in engaging students in research and mindful that students will benefit from such involvement when it is time to apply for internship. This encouragement to participate in research is evident in the various mentoring relationships that develop within the program.

Throughout the formal four-course progression, students are encouraged to join faculty research teams. Students may opt to take credit for research team involvement which can then be applied towards an elective course requirement. Though not a methods course per se, students who join research teams experience intensive involvement in actual research projects, from inception to manuscript preparation. We estimate that approximately 35 to 40% of our full-time students are consistent members of faculty research teams. Regent University also awards faculty research grants, which many of us use to fund students on our research teams.

Collaborative Research Opportunities with Faculty

Table 2 provides a summary of collaborative research endeavors at Regent during the 2003-2004 academic year. There were 39 different collaborative activities between faculty and students during this time. At least 42 different doctoral students were involved in these collaborative activities which constitutes about one third of our total

Table 2
Collaborative Research at Regent During the 2003-2004 Academic Year

Student – Faculty Collaboration Activity	Number
Professional Presentations	16
Journal Articles	21
Book Chapters	1
Books	1
Faculty – Faculty Collaboration Activity	Number
Professional Presentations	4
Journal Articles	8
Books	1

current enrollments. The most common faculty-student research collaboration was co-authorship of journal articles. Co-presentations at professional meetings constituted a close second. The collaboration occurred within several forums, but primarily within faculty research teams. Two of these have reached the level of university recognized centers: the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI), and the Marriage Ministry Assessment, Training & Empowerment (MMATE) Center (www.regent.edu/marriage). Other research teams are currently addressing a diverse range of topics such as: clinical psychology of religion, the connection between mystical experience and personality patterns, consultation with military organizations and fire services, ADHD and religious/spiritual functioning, ADHD prevalence, salutogenic effects of spirituality, clinical health psychology, God image and psychological functioning, and various issues related to effective clinical supervision.

The Regent doctoral program had 8 core faculty during the 2003-2004 academic year. Because each faculty mentors their own research teams, a greater tendency exists for faculty-student collaboration as opposed to between faculty. However, several faculty collaborations have occurred during the year. We are a small and collegial faculty that frequently exchange ideas and provide support for each others' research endeavors. The most common form of formal faculty collaboration during the 2003-2004 academic year was coordinated contributions to special issues of journals. Our faculty also collaborated on a number of projects with faculty from other institutions during the year.

We recently initiated pre-doctoral concentrations in clinical specialty areas at Regent. Currently, we have four areas of concentration: clinical child psychology, marriage and family, clinical health psychology, and consulting psychology. Although the focus of our pre-doctoral training remains the general practice of clinical psychology, students are able to obtain additional emphases in these recognized specialty areas of practice. In order to complete the optional pre-doctoral concentrations, students must take additional electives in the concentration area, become actively involved on a relevant faculty research team, perform a related practicum placement, and conduct dissertation research in the concentration area. This structured approach is intended to facilitate our students' preparation for advanced specialization post-degree. It also provides incentive for student involvement in optional research experiences connected in focused ways to their clinical interests. Our goal is to set in motion a synergistic set of factors that encourages students with the primary career path of clinical practice to see research as a relevant and enriching activity.

Relative Importance of Research in Program

Research and scholarship is highly valued relative to clinical skill training; however, the primary focus of our program is development of clinical competencies. Consistent with the practitioner-scholar model of training, students are provided with research training that enables them to comprehend and critique journal articles. In clinical supervision, students are frequently required to search the literature for pertinent articles. For example, a student may

need to research the literature on recovered memory techniques and false memory syndrome when a client reports they discovered they were victims of satanic ritual abuse in a previous treatment context. Further, students are trained in conceptualization of clinical research areas. For example, students are encouraged to apply research paradigms to program evaluation of clinical services and other consultative projects within their practicum sites. We emphasize applied and action research when appropriate, and use of qualitative approaches for relatively under-explored areas such as faith experiences, God-image, same-sex attraction, covenantal marriage, forgiveness of self and intropunitiveness, and faith in military leadership.

Research and clinical training are inextricably linked in our program. Our teaching is grounded in the importance of clinical practice informed by research findings and empirically validated treatments. Further, we integrate psychometrics and measurement theory when appropriate such as in the Intelligence Testing and Psychometrics course. Throughout our program, we emphasize critical thinking and analytic skills that are inherent in scientific method. Our students are taught to be cautiously skeptical of proclaimed treatments until they are verified. They are also taught that findings represent approximate truths and must be taken in context. In short, we see knowledge and application of research methods as exercises in critical thinking and analytic reasoning.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Regent Approach

There are two major strengths of our research and scholarship program. First, faculty research teams allow for mentorship, cross fertilization of ideas, and a smooth progression towards the dissertation goal. For example, one research team focuses on forgiveness. A student joined the team in the first semester of her first year and participated in data collection and entry on a project examining personality and forgiveness of self and others. During her second year, the faculty member received a university grant to fund this student as she continued to develop her interests and ideas in the area. The student's third year project involved a pilot study with an incarcerated sample to examine negative affect as represented by lack of self-forgiveness. For her fourth year, she will again be grant funded to perform an experimental study on forgiveness

interventions and relapse risk within an incarcerated sample. This particular student is using a third-year member of the research team as an intervention co-leader, and this third-year student is developing a related dissertation topic. The faculty member is searching for a promising second-year student to also participate. This example is typical of faculty research teams insofar as students receive gradual and developmental exposure to a topical area, mentorship by more senior students and the faculty member, probable grant funding, and valuable experience in the nuances of data collection and analysis.

Second, the practitioner-scholar model of training allows a realistic emphasis on research. We do not operate on the illusion long associated with many Boulder model programs that our students are being trained first as research scientists. The Regent program intentionally focuses on inculcating those scientific skills most directly relevant to practice. The relatively heavy emphasis on training in the crystallized knowledge base of psychological science in Psy.D. programs such as ours illustrates this point.

Perhaps the major weakness of the practitioner-scholar model adopted at Regent is its relative novelty. Although Psy.D. programs received strong impetus from the Vail conference in the early 1970's, they reflect a varied set of actual training models. An intentional repositioning of clinical psychology as a field science over a laboratory science may seem warranted by its context of operation but most of clinical psychology's scientific self-understandings are still tied to experimentation. There is a need for better training resources for scientific methodologies useful for a rigorous psychological field science. Hathaway (in press) has called for Christian training programs to be instrumental in developing the sorts of expanded scientific methodologies that will facilitate a more comprehensive psychological science capable of addressing the whole range of humanness suggested by theological anthropology. While we believe the Regent program is making small, intentional steps in this direction, limitations arising from the heavy demands of training already present on our faculty hinder the level of investment we can commit to this innovation. Yet if the practitioner-scholar model of training is to fulfill its potential, it must become instantiated in ways that reflect a rich field science rivaling the contributions to psychological science that have been made through the experimental tradition.

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