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**Update: THE CHARTERING PROCESS  
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*“Determining how one becomes chartered to practice psychology in Alberta is a fundamental way of protecting the public...”*

The chartering process is one of the most important functions of the College of Alberta Psychologists. Determining how one becomes chartered to practice psychology in Alberta is a fundamental way of protecting the public from incompetent and unethical practice.

The College, which operates under provincial legislation, agrees with government that the chartering process should be competency-based, fair, equitable, transparent and oriented to service needs. To achieve these goals, CAP is proceeding on a number of different fronts.

### **Academic credentials**

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This year, the Universities Co-ordinating Council delegated to the College the responsibilities for evaluating the academic credentials of applicants. The Credentials Evaluation Committee was created to oversee this work. With the considerable diversity of content in psychology programs and the increasing numbers of universities offering degrees, the job of evaluating credentials has become complex.

Current entrance criteria in Alberta are a Master's degree in psychology from a recognized university program, along with course content covering a range of psychological knowledge. These criteria have been adapted from those approved by the National Health Register, the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, and the Council of Provincial Associations of Psychology. The content is essentially the same for Master's and Doctoral applicants – courses in scientific and professional ethics; research design and methodology; statistics and psychometrics; biological bases of behaviour; cognitive/affective bases of behaviour; social bases of behaviour; and individual differences.

The Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychological Association, the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, and the Canadian Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology all officially support making a doctoral degree with required level of training. However, it appears that Alberta will retain the Master's entry level criterion for the present. Both the College of Alberta Psychologists and the Psychologists' Association of Alberta argue that a psychologist who is considered competent in one jurisdiction should be considered competent in another, regardless of the entry-level degree.

Whether the type of academic degree held is an indicator of competency is an important issue today. Psychologists are increasingly mobile under the terms of NAFTA (North

American Free Trade Agreement with Canada, United States, and Mexico) and AIT (Agreement on Internal Trade across Canadian provinces).

### **Examination for Professional Practice of Psychology (EPPP)**

Candidates are eligible to take the EPPP upon obtaining approval of academic credentials and provisional charter status. The EPPP, which is currently administered in mid-April or mid-October each year, will be fully computerized by the year 2004 and available at computer sites several times a year. This exam, created by ASPPB and written in all jurisdictions on the same day, is the only standardized requirement across North American jurisdictions. Alberta complies with the ASPPB recommended pass mark of 70%.

This 200-item, multiple-choice exam is intended to measure knowledge required to be a psychologist, and is based on content areas defined through a practice analysis of psychologists in North America. The content areas correspond roughly to the criteria for evaluating academic credentials, namely, assessment and diagnosis, biological bases of behaviour, cognitive-affective bases of behaviour, ethical/legal/professional issues, growth and life span development, research methods, social and multicultural bases of behaviour and treatment/intervention.

As with academic credentials, there is controversy over the extent to which the EPPP is an indicator of competency.

### **Oral examination**

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Candidates who pass the EPPP are eligible to take the College's oral examination, which focuses on ethical and competency issues. The individual is expected to demonstrate that he or she meets minimal standards for independent practice.

A panel of three examiners selected from CAP's Oral Examinations Committee uses a semi-structured interview to question the candidate. The panel also reviews a work sample. (The College is now more precisely defining the jurisprudence issues about which psychologists need to be knowledgeable.)

Oral examinations have been praised as a step that provides final scrutiny before admitting someone to the profession. They have also been criticized as being subjective and arbitrary.

In the United States, many jurisdictions are concerned that the oral examination may not be legally defensible, and they seek either greater standardization or discontinuation. In Alberta, CAP is seeking greater standardization of the process while still allowing for professional judgement on the part of examiners and diversity of interests and practice of the part of candidates.

## **Supervised work experience**

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As soon as applicants have had their academic credentials approved, they may be registered as provisional Psychologists, who submit plans for 1600 hours of supervised work experience to the Registration Committee. CAP is reviewing the guidelines for supervisors and candidates with a view to defining the expectations of all parties more clearly. Of all the chartering requirements, supervised work experience has the greatest face validity in relation to competency to practice.

## **Final approval**

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After reviewing all the information about a candidate, the Registration Committee gives final approval for becoming a Chartered Psychologist. Yes, character references and criminal checks are part of this process. The candidate must also pay a fee to be registered.

All of the steps in the chartering process are intended, at most, to assure public of competent and ethical practice, and, at least, to protect against harm. The following questions still need to be answered:

- Are current requirements relevant to competent practice and protection of the public?
- Are they effective, efficient, transparent and fair?
- Will they comply with the upcoming Health Professions legislation?

When I began working as a psychologist, we had no provincial association, no professional regulation and not much recognition as practitioners. What a difference today. The regulation of the profession of psychology, so often said to protect the public, has also earned its members tremendous credibility and a status in society that was not previously enjoyed.

We need to keep the regulatory functions. We also need to constantly review our strategies for protecting the public and supporting psychologists to ensure that they are still effective and fair. It is important to eliminate the irrelevant, ineffective and obstructive.

New legislation and the increasing the mobility of psychologists across jurisdictions are opening windows of opportunity. There is work to do!