

*BEA Grant for Innovation in Career and Professional Skill Development for Psychology
Graduate Students, Interns and Postdoctoral Trainees/Scholars*

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Need and Approach

The MA Psychology (MAP) program at the University of Cincinnati was established in 2015 to support students pursuing careers in organizational and community psychology. The program admits 20-25 students per year who complete the program in an average of just over one calendar year. Upon graduation, students pursue roles in I/O psychology, organizational development and consulting, human resources, program management, research, and other non-clinical roles in community and nonprofit organizations.

The MAP program is administered by a part-time program director, a part-time graduate program coordinator, and a part-time graduate assistant. We lack the staffing resources within the department to provide comprehensive professional and career development opportunities. Thus, in 2018 we partnered with what is now UC's College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies (CCPS), to create a two-credit hour course (PD6170: Graduate Student Professionalism) to address our students' professional development needs. This course helps students:

- explore career options, identify and articulate cross-cutting skills from their required coursework, and develop professional tools and resources to prepare them for the next chapter of their professional life. While students build their professional resources (resume/CV, cover letter/personal statement, LinkedIn/Handshake profile, interviewing skills, and more), they will also engage in self-exploration exercises to further explore their sense of purpose and to connect major, career, and self with corresponding career interests.

Students, particularly those with no prior professional development support, appreciate many aspects of this course. Yet, other data suggest opportunities for improvement:

- Over the last four years, just 75% of MAP students responding to a graduate exit survey (n=84) indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the career development opportunities provided by the program. Satisfaction rates for other program components exceed 90%.
- Course evaluations and informal feedback from students indicate a desire for more direct assistance finding internships and jobs, and more individualized support given that their professional development needs and career goals vary.
- As noted by the external reviewer in our 2023 Program Review, there is a recognized need for a more comprehensive job search/placement strategy that involves various networks, including alumni.

The BEA funds will be used to address these concerns. In partnership with CCPS and the Graduate College, we propose redesigning and piloting a new PD course to provide more substantive career guidance through the utilization of Individualized Development Plans (IDPs) and piloting a mentoring program that connects current students with program alumni. This effort aligns well with UC's mission and history. UC is the founding institution of cooperative education and is regularly named among the top public co-op programs in the U.S. News & World rankings. In 2019, the university implemented career education learning outcomes to demonstrate the importance of career-readiness and professional development. UC leadership also expanded the definition of co-op to emphasize the importance of professional readiness for all students undergraduate and graduate. As such, the opportunity to develop a new initiative is exciting because of the institutional support and the possibility of replicating this pilot with other departments at the graduate level.

Timeline and Personnel

Phase I (Summer 2024): Members of the program team will review the existing PD course and assessment data, develop learning objectives for the revised course, and build the new syllabus and materials; review the IDP templates used by the Graduate College and APA, determine what modifications are needed for MA students, and create the final template; develop role descriptions and goals for the Mentor Program, and recruit mentors.

Phase II (Fall 2024): At student orientation, we will introduce the PD course and mentorship program and assess career readiness. The 1-credit hour Fall course launches, during which students develop their IDPs, engage in career exploration, and build professional skills. In September, we will gather mentors for a half-day program launch and training session. In December, students will finalize their IDPs. We will use IDPs to match students with their mentor and identify workshops for the spring course that align with needs.

Phase III (Spring 2025): We will offer the second 1-credit hour course, during which students implement their IDPs, participate in skill-building workshops, and engage with their mentor. At the end of the term, we will gather formative assessment data from students and mentors (see evaluation plan below) and host the alumni/mentor networking event for students.

Phase IV (Summer 2025): The project team will use formative and summative data to assess the pilot of the new course and the mentoring program as outlined in the evaluation plan below. Based on these findings, we will revise the course, IDP template and process, and mentoring program as needed to prepare for the second year of the program.

Project Team:

Stacie Furst-Holloway (Assoc. Professor, Department of Psychology): Furst-Holloway (SFH) is the Director of the MAP program. She developed the program, designed the curriculum, and has directed the program since inception. Thus, she has the program history and disciplinary expertise to lead this project.

Erin Alanson (Assoc. Professor; Interim Director of Multidisciplinary Career Education Unit, CCPS): Alanson (EA) oversees partnerships between CCPS and academic units to develop curricular and co-curricular support toward meeting career education learning outcomes. She is piloting a series of initiatives to increase experiential learning and professional development opportunities with the Graduate College.

Stephen Amundson (Asst. Professor of Career Education; Interim Director for the Bearcat Promise Career Studio): Amundson (SA) leads graduate career education courses, including PD6170. He helps adult students recognize their strengths, values and interests while carving out meaningful career paths in the field of Psychology. MAP students benefit from his emphasis on developing critical thinking, communication, and self-advocacy skills—essential tools for thriving in the professional world.

Caitie Norrie (Manager of Program Development, Graduate College): Norrie (CN) oversees professional development and career planning efforts across all graduate programs at UC. Norrie is in constant contact with Graduate College leadership, ensuring that programs align with the overall vision for graduate education. Norrie also coordinates multiple professional development workshops and events, making for a variety of extracurricular PD opportunities.

Funding and Support

We are requesting funds to cover a portion of the costs for piloting the new PD course and Mentoring Program. These costs are detailed below:

- 1) Mentor honorarium: For the Mentoring Program, we will recruit 20 mentors (focusing primarily on program alumni) who will be matched with a MAP student based on career interests, background, and experiences. Mentors will be expected to meet with mentees at least three times over the course of spring semester, including at least one in-person meeting at the mentor's organization. Mentors will be asked to provide job shadowing, career guidance, and networking opportunities for their mentee, as well as opportunities to develop professionalism and communication skills. We are budgeting for an honorarium of \$400 for 20 mentors for a total cost of \$8,000.
- 2) To prepare mentors for their engagement with mentees, we will hold a ½-day Mentoring Workshop in the Fall. At this workshop we will discuss the goals of the program, share best practices associated with mentoring of graduate students, and work with mentors to develop a schedule of activities and learning outcomes for their mentee. We are budgeting \$1,000 to cover the cost of parking and lunch for the 20 mentors and program leaders.
- 3) At the end of Spring semester, we will host a Mentor and Alumni Networking event in spring so that student mentees can broaden their networks and to engage other alumni as potential future mentors or internship/job placement sites. We are budgeting \$1,500 for this event to cover food and beverages expenses, small UC merchandised gifts for mentors and alumni, and parking expenses for all guests.
- 4) CCPS will assign the development of the new PD course, which will include a 1-credit course in the Fall and one in the Spring, to one of their faculty members. We are budgeting \$1,000 for development of the new course, paid as professional development funds in lieu of salary.

The total cost for piloting this program is estimated to be \$11,500. We are requesting \$5,000 in support from the BEA Grant, which represents about 40% of the total cost. The remaining costs will be covered by The Graduate College, CCPS, and the College of Arts & Sciences. Letters of support are available upon request.

Outcomes

Our goals for this program are fairly straightforward: we want to provide opportunities via the professional development course, the utilization of IDPs, and participation in the mentoring program to increase students' career readiness and their ability to obtain a high-quality position in their desired field. Thus, our goals align well with the objective of the BEA grant to assist students in acquiring and developing career and professional skills that allow them to transition successfully into the workforce.

Our ability to achieve our program goals will be contingent on how well we execute each of these three strategies. Thus, to assess the impact of the new course, IDPs, and mentoring initiative, we will gather formative and summative assessment data.

Formative Data will include:

- Survey data collected after the September Mentor luncheon and training to assess perceptions of role clarity, satisfaction with the training provided, quality of communication, plans for their mentee
- Formal course evaluations collected after the fall and semester classes are completed, as well as informal feedback gathered at the mid-point of each term
- Focus group data collected at the end of the academic year from mentors to assess their experiences with the mentee and perceptions of their professionalism and career readiness, satisfaction with the program structure, strengths of the initiative, and opportunities for improvement
- Reviews of IDP content and implementation from the project team (i.e., a cross section of MAP faculty, CCPS, and Graduate College staff)
- Survey data collected at the end of the academic year from MAP students to assess their perceptions of the mentoring program and IDP process. The survey will include the 9-item version of the Mentor Function Questionnaire (MFQ-9; Pelligrini & Scandura, 2005) that assesses perceptions of mentors' career and psychosocial support and role modeling IDP questions will center on the utility of the tool, the extent to which students relied on their IDP to inform and guide their activities. For both, we will identify strengths of the initiatives and opportunities for improvement.

Summative Data will include:

- To assess the extent to which participation changes students' perceptions of career readiness (including career knowledge and skills, career motivation, and career seeking activities), we will administer a modified version of the Career Resources Questionnaire (CRQ; Marciniak, Hirschi, Johnston, & Haenggli, 2020) at orientation in August (Time 1) and then at the completion of the second PD course (Time 2).
- Results from the university's graduate exit survey assessing satisfaction with Career Development offered through the program (with which we can benchmark to prior years)

- Internship and job placement data for spring and summer 2025 graduates that we can compare with placements in prior years.