Industrial and Organizational Psychology
PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE AND PRACTICE

Don't Forget About Us! Students' Perspectives

ALEXANDER T. JACKSON
Kansas State University

KELSEY N. PARKER
The University of Tulsa

CHRISTOPHER J. WAPLES
Kansas State University

In their focal article, Byrne et al. (2014) provide several suggestions for improving the training of industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists. As current students, and future professionals, Byrne et al.'s suggestions are of particular interest to us. After reviewing the focal article and considering the implications of their recommendations, we find ourselves resoundingly ambivalent. The authors have presented ideas (e.g., greater consistency in internship quality, more comprehensive training for future academics) that offer a host of benefits, not only to students but to their subsequent stakeholders. However, despite initially positive impressions, further reflection has instilled in us a sense of hesitation. Prior to implementing Byrne et al.'s suggestions, consideration is warranted for the consequences of such changes on us, the students.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alexander T. Jackson.
E-mail: atjacks@k-state.edu
Address: Department of Psychological Sciences, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506

Certified Internships

One of the most noteworthy ideas presented in the focal article is that of creating a certification program for internships through

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12100 Published online by Cambridge University Press

SIOP. As the authors argued, the implementation of such a program would certainly help students select internships that would be professionally and developmentally valuable. Internships are a frequent source of ''horror stories'' from advanced graduate students who have committed months of their graduate training period to what ultimately constitutes underwhelming clerical work and a glorified office assistantship. A process of certification to ensure the existence of certain standards would alleviate some of the ambiguity in searching for a high quality experience. Accordingly, we applaud the authors' suggestion that SIOP begin certifying internship opportunities that meet established standards of excellence.

Having noted our support for a certification process, however, we feel it is important that we express some concerns about the use of such certifications. The authors, at one point, urge ''I–O programs to *require* certified internships for practice-aimed students'' (p. 4, emphasis added). Although inclusion of certification as a graduation criterion *may* be feasible over the long-term, it does not seem viable in the more immediate future. Even ignoring certification, simply finding any internship can be a challenge in small, saturated markets. Because not all available internships would earn certification, fulfilling a *certified* internship requirement would inevitably impede graduation progress for many students.

An additional question we have is, how will the SIOP committee ensure that the espoused development opportunities are actually present in the certified internships? At the point of certification, an organization may provide the opportunities listed in the position statement, yet over time, the organization and internship position are likely to evolve. Thus, the competency development opportunities are expected to evolve with the organization. This may be problematic for students searching for internships offering specific opportunities.

Instead, we think certified internships should be encouraged, not required. Further, we concur with the authors' later suggestion that certification be used as a ''stamp of approval,'' similar to earning a place on *Fortune's* annual list of Best Companies to Work For. By using certification to convey approval, it would help students and their advisors identify internships that offer excellent prospects for development. It may also give organizations that are considering the creation of intern positions some benchmarks from which to design positions into more refined, valuable opportunities. In this way, smaller organizations with more infrequently, project-specific availabilities would, indeed, have a chance at leveling the playing field with the more traditional, perennial I–O internship offerings.

Certified Post-docs

Consistent with our thoughts on the certification of internships, SIOP-certified postdoctoral positions represent a noteworthy opportunity for the development of future academics. In particular, Byrne et al.'s suggestion that certified postdocs could serve as a vehicle for developing skills suited to the current needs of academic institutions would be welcome training. Presumably, given the broad focus of most I–O graduate programs, grant writing likely represents a consistent deficiency for new PhD graduates in the field. Such deficiencies undoubtedly pose tenure and promotion problems for students making the transition into faculty roles, especially in the face of increasing demand for research funding to supplement cutbacks for higher education. Certification would then offer some assurance for students seeking postdoctoral positions with a focus on skill development that extends beyond heavy teaching loads.

Despite the benefits that may stem from certification of postdocs, some consideration for the drawbacks of the process must be made. As students approaching completion of our doctoral studies, perhaps our most poignant concern is that implementation of postdoc requirements would add yet another year (or more) onto our already

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12100 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lengthy training. Graduate students in traditional programs are already foregoing 5 or more years of professional experience and income in favor of pursuing advanced education; in many cases, requiring a certified postdoc would simply delay the acquisition of full-time academic positions for students. This is especially problematic for tenure-track positions, given that it may delay the entire tenure process without providing substantive benefits.

Delaying the acquisition of gainful employment even 1 year increases the financial burden placed on us, the students. We all know that an undergraduate and graduate school education is expensive. Today many students are required to take on student loans in order to afford an education. It is estimated that 73% of I–O PhD students graduate with some amount of student loan debt, and on average, these students owe over $60,000 (Michalski, Kohout, Wicherski, & Hart, 2011). Further, most loans require students to begin paying their debt shortly after graduating. By requiring a certified postdoc and delaying the tenure process even 1 year, students will be required to begin paying their student loan debt while earning a postdoctoral wage. This may not be financially feasible for some and may actually dissuade students from pursuing a career in academia.

The authors also alluded to the value of postdoctoral experiences as a mechanism for creating a competitive advantage over students in organizational behavior (OB) programs. Although such experiences would certainly make I–O candidates more attractive for both I–O and OB positions, it seems that students coming from psychology backgrounds would be better served by leveraging an internship experience to reframe their knowledge into practical business instruction. This distinction would, in turn, require those of us interested in academic careers to cater to I–O programs, to cater to OB programs, or to extend our training period further still to accommodate both. Restrictive in their own unique ways, each of the options detracts from whatever competitive advantage may be gained through requisite postdoc experience.

The sheer scarcity of I–O postdoctoral positions makes the idea of being required to hold one even more concerning. A recent search of SIOP's JobNet revealed no postdoc postings whatsoever. Similarly, a search of APA's PsycCareers and the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers' Postdoctoral Programs revealed a combined 101 postdoctoral positions, none of which were even tangentially related to I–O psychology. Accordingly, unless the number of available positions increases dramatically, making certified postdocs a widespread hiring requirement would be wholly infeasible. Given that most postdocs are funded through grants and that such funds are becoming less accessible, we do not foresee the number of available positions to increase sufficiently to support requirement of said experiences.

Expansion of Competencies

Byrne et al. focused no small part of their discussion around the adequacy of the SIOP *Guidelines for Education and Training* (SIOP, 1999). The authors' position seemed to be somewhat inconsistent throughout their article and, accordingly, struck very distinct chords of interest. Byrne et al.'s initial discussion of the *Guidelines* seemed to argue for expansion of the established list of competencies to include everything from avoiding counterproductive behaviors to self-marketing. In large part, as students, we question the value in formalizing such additions to an already-long list of core competencies. Should graduate programs truly be held responsible for their students' capacity for avoiding interpersonal conflicts and engaging in unsavory workplace antics? To us, it seems that acquisition of such competencies is beyond the scope of both the *Guidelines* seeking to describe the discipline and the graduate institutions that are training researchers and practitioners of the discipline.

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12100 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Enlarging the list to include career-specific competencies seems equally inappropriate. I–O students already have exceptionally broad graduate training requirements. Adding items like grant writing skills to the established list of competencies may indeed improve the odds of students receiving related training, but as it is not a skill set that all practitioners would necessarily find useful, it may simply increase graduate training time for no practical or professional gain.

Interestingly, later in their article, the authors state that ''decisions about the breadth and depth of knowledge and skill to be developed and demonstrated are resolved in individual cases—therein lies the beauty of the word *guidelines* rather than *standards*'' (p. 11). As students, it is this position that we support. Comprehensive, exhaustive descriptions of all activities related to I–O psychology seem unnecessary, if the goal of the document is to describe the general structure of the discipline. Graduate departments should retain the capacity to devise their own interpretation of and weighting for the various components of that structure; this is illustrated by the variability in competency coverage across institutions found in the graduate program benchmarking survey conducted by Tett, Walser, Brown, Simonet, and Tonidandel (2013). Further, students should have the opportunity to choose the program that best suits individual interests and developmental needs.

We also concur with the authors, however, that it is important that the *Guidelines* remain up to date. As opposed to making the list (and corresponding training duration) longer, minor revisions of existing competencies would seem to resolve the authors' concerns about their being outdated. For example, changing ''consulting and business skills'' to ''professional skills'' would seem to broaden the competency sufficiently to resolve nearly all identified deficiencies.

Conclusion

Given that student development is at the core of Byrne et al.'s discussion, it is an issue that has, as they intended, generated a great deal of discussion, particularly among students. Based upon the discussions of which we have been a part, there are mixed reactions to their suggestions. It is clear that the authors' intent is to improve the professional capacity of I–O graduates and enhance our ability to secure positions in which we can be productive contributors of science and practice. However, it seems that the authors have neglected the negative implications that these positive steps may carry. In particular, we wonder if the authors, as established professionals in their respective careers, have forgotten what it was like when they were doctoral students trying to begin their careers. In writing this commentary, we hope to have contributed to the discussion regarding educating I–O psychologists by providing the perspectives from current I–O psychology students. Moving forward, we urge SIOP to have student representatives on the committees responsible for certifying internships, certifying postdocs, and modifying the guidelines. After all, it is our education.

References

Byrne, Z. S., Hayes, T. L., McPhail, S. M., Hakel, M. D., Cortina, J. M., & McHenry, J. J. (2014). Educating industrial–organizational psychologists for science and practice: Where do we go from here? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, *7*(1), 2–14.

Michalski, D., Kohout, J., Wicherski, M., & Hart, B. (2011). *2009 doctorate employment survey*. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/09-doc-empl/report.pdf

SIOP. (1999). *Guidelines for education and training at the doctoral level in industrial-organizational psychology*. Retrieved from http://www.siop.org/PhDGuidelines98.aspx

Tett, R. P., Walser, B., Brown, C., Simonet, D. V., & Tonidandel, S. (2013). 2011 SIOP graduate program benchmarking survey: part 3: Curriculum and competencies. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, *50*(4), 69–90.

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12100 Published online by Cambridge University Press