

Accreditation Value Survey: Training Directors' Perspectives on the Value of American Psychological Association (APA) Accreditation

Joseph D. Hovey¹, Jacqueline R. Wall², Aaron P. Jackson³, Jacob H. Meyers², Naomi O'Connor², Douglas Peterson⁴, Jim A. Haugh⁵, and Greg E. Manship⁶

¹ Department of Psychological Science, Behavioral Health Lab, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

² American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, United States

³ Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University

⁴ Department of Psychology, University of South Dakota

⁵ Department of Psychology, Rowan University

⁶ Order of Saint Francis Healthcare, Peoria, Illinois, United States

To examine accredited program directors' satisfaction with the American Psychological Association's (APA) accreditation policies and procedures, including the *Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology* and to examine value perceptions of holding accreditation, the APA Commission on Accreditation research workgroup developed and administered an Accreditation Value Survey. The Accreditation Value Survey assessed program directors' views of the importance of APA accreditation, ways in which APA accreditation is associated with program improvement, and the perceived usefulness of and satisfaction with APA accreditation. The Accreditation Value Survey was sent to training directors of all accredited doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral programs. Slightly over one fourth of the training directors began the survey, and more than one fifth completed the items. Respondents' answers largely noted that APA accreditation serves important functions and that accreditation was useful for their own program's improvement practices. In addition, respondents were generally satisfied with accreditation practices, processes, and tools. Some benefits of accreditation appeared more salient to internship program directors than to doctoral program directors, as internship directors were more likely, for example, to identify accreditation processes as being beneficial for achieving program aims, improving program climate and training in diversity, and recruiting diverse students and faculty. Finally, some training directors reported that obtaining and maintaining accreditation is arduous and that the accreditation process is more useful than satisfying. In conclusion, the authors suggest that quality improvement strategies should be considered, and future directions for research are identified.

Public Significance Statement

The U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation recognize the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation (APA-CoA) as a programmatic accrediting organization in the United States for professional education and training in health service psychology. The APA-CoA accredits doctoral programs, doctoral internship programs, and postdoctoral residency programs in clinical, counseling, and school psychology. In an effort toward evaluating their accreditation processes, the APA-CoA surveyed program training directors on their satisfaction with the *Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology* and their value perceptions of holding accreditation. This article discusses training directors' views of the benefits of accreditation as well as their suggestions for quality improvement strategies.

Keywords: American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation, accreditation, training and education, health service psychology, professional psychology

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Joseph D. Hovey  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3968-0942>

JOSEPH D. HOVEY, PhD, is a professor of Psychological Science at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and a licensed psychologist in the state of Texas. He has served as a member of the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation since 2021, as cochair of the Research Workgroup in 2023, and as cochair of the Master's Policy Group in 2024 and 2025. His research and scholarly interests include the mental health of acculturating individuals, rural health, the cultural adaptation and development of psychological measures, and the dissemination and implementation

of evidence-based interventions for anxiety, depression, and suicide behavior.

JACQUELINE R. WALL, PhD, holds emeriti rank at the University of Indianapolis. She received a doctoral degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Tulsa and a clinical respecialization certificate from the Illinois Institute of Technology. She completed a clinical internship at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine/Sonny Montgomery Veterans Affairs Medical Center and a postdoctoral residency in neuropsychology and Rehabilitation Psychology at the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan/Wayne State University School of Medicine. Her research interests have focused on individual assessment and program evaluation.

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Need for Evaluation of Accreditation Processes

According to the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the goals of accreditation are to assess the quality of academic institutions and programs; create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality; involve faculty and staff in program planning, delivery, and evaluation; and establish standards for entry into a profession, when a particular field, for example, may require graduation from an accredited program (e.g., for professional licensure in a health profession such as psychology; Brittingham et al., 2010; Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2023a; Eaton, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

The American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation (APA-CoA) is recognized as a programmatic accrediting organization in the United States for professional education and training in health service psychology (HSP) by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2023b) and the U.S. Department of Education (2024). As part of its recognized scope, the APA-CoA accredits doctoral programs in clinical, counseling, and school psychology, along with combinations of at least two of these practice areas, doctoral internship programs in HSP, and postdoctoral residency programs in HSP. The Commission's foundational

values include the promotion of consistent quality and excellence in education and training in HSP (APA, 2022). In addition to accredited programs and their associated faculty, staff, students, and trainees, the primary beneficiaries of CoA accreditation include prospective students, higher education institutions, public consumers of HSP, and the field of psychology itself.

Having accreditation provides numerous potential benefits to programs (Brittingham et al., 2010; Cohen, 2019; Eaton, 2015; Hage et al., 2020). For example, the process of accreditation serves as a quality control mechanism, helps to ensure that programs have appropriate educational aims, examines program data to determine whether programs are meeting their identified aims, and can provide a roadmap for budgetary resources necessary for programs to obtain and maintain accreditation. Moreover, accreditation may determine whether a particular program meets a minimum threshold of quality as set forth by standards of the accrediting body, thus benefiting and protecting the profession, the public, and current and future students. The feedback provided by external reviewers during the accreditation process may also lead to revisions of a program's emphases, thus strengthening the training provided. Finally, having accreditation helps to highlight what programs have to offer the public, engenders private sector confidence in program graduates, and enhances programs' reputations.

AARON P. JACKSON, PhD, is the training director in the Counseling Psychology doctoral program at Brigham Young University. He completed his PhD in Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia and his doctoral internship at the University of Utah Counseling Center. His research has focused on qualitative methods and the underlying philosophies and values in health service psychology.

JACOB H. MEYERS, MA, is the assistant director for Research in the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation at the American Psychological Association. He works with the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation as the staff liaison for the Research Workgroup and Internship Policy Group. His research interests include education and training in professional psychology, higher education accreditation, and program evaluation.

NAOMI O'CONNOR holds a BA in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She is currently a management specialist for Accreditation Processes and Services at the American Psychological Association in Washington, DC, where she manages accreditation processes and statuses, ensures compliance with the American Psychological Association standards, and prepares comprehensive reports. Since January 2022, Naomi O'Connor has played a pivotal part in guiding psychology programs through accreditation and analyzing relevant program data. Her prior experiences combine a global perspective with a strong foundation in both academic and service-oriented roles.

DOUGLAS PETERSON, PhD, is an associate professor and chair in the Psychology Department at the University of South Dakota. He has served as a member of the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation and as chair of the Research Workgroup. His research interests include mental workload measurement, aviation human factors, human computer interaction, educational technology, neuroergonomics, and consumer psychology.

JIM A. HAUGH received his MA and PhD in Clinical Psychology from Saint Louis University in St Louis, Missouri. He is an associate professor of Psychology at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, and currently serves as the director of Clinical Training for the PhD Program in Clinical Psychology at Rowan University. His research focuses on depression, mobile applications for mood disorders, integration of primary care and clinical psychology, and self-help.

GREG E. MANSHP, DBE, MDiv, serves as the manager of the Human Subject Protection Program within the Research Administration at Order of Saint Francis HealthCare in Peoria, Illinois. Previous to joining Order of Saint Francis HealthCare, Greg served in the roles of director of Human Research Protections and adjunct faculty at the University of Indianapolis. Greg served as a public member of the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation from 2017 through 2022, during which time he also served on the Research Workgroup and Doctoral Policy Group. Greg continues his service with the American Psychological Association as the public member of the Ethics Code Task Force. Greg has authored and coauthored publications in the fields of undergraduate medical education and health care ethics.

Please note that the data sets generated and/or analyzed during the present study are available from the authors upon reasonable request and with the permission of the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation and the American Psychological Association.

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CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE should be addressed to Joseph D. Hovey, Department of Psychological Science, Behavioral Health Lab, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 1201 West University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539, United States. Email: joseph.hovey@utrgv.edu

The CoA recently transitioned from the *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology* (G&P; APA, 2006a) to the current *Standards of Accreditation (SoA) for Health Service Psychology and Accreditation Operating Procedures* (APA, 2022). As detailed by Bell et al. (2017), the development and adoption of SoA processes occurred in response to several changes within, and outside of, the field of psychology. The SoA requires programs to specify aims, rather than training models, as required by the G&P, because established training models may not have meaningfully captured program aims. In addition, the SoA also moved toward a uniformly defined competency-based accreditation process in order to reflect the profession's increased focus on a competency-based approach to training, which provides for more consistent training experiences across programs. The SoA also developed profession-wide competencies (PWCs), which reflect core competencies that all graduates of *all programs* within accredited HSP programs should demonstrate. The PWCs for doctoral programs are identical to the PWCs for internship programs, given that internship training is conceptualized as part of the training that leads to the doctoral degree and that internship training deepens and integrates the PWCs attained from doctoral programs. In addition, the SoA requires discipline-specific knowledge areas (DSKs), which reflect the core knowledge of specific areas of psychology (e.g., social aspects of behavior) that students must have to attain the PWCs. In comparison to the scientific psychology content areas of the G&P, the DSKs are better integrated and more flexible, so as to allow for growth as the profession changes. Moreover, consistent with other professions, the SoA allows for the achievement of DSKs to be attained outside of doctoral program training. For example, some basic psychology knowledge may be acquired prior to doctoral training (although programs must demonstrate how they document students' prior acquisition of DSKs). Finally, the SoA more greatly emphasizes training that provides preparation toward working competently with individuals from diverse cultural and personal backgrounds and also requires that programs make systematic efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty, students, and staff.

In regard to changes outside of psychology, approximately 2 decades ago, the U.S. Department of Education (2006) more greatly emphasized the importance of accreditors incorporating outcomes into accreditation guidelines and of requiring programs to report these outcomes to the public. Since then, the emphasis within higher education has been toward greater responsibility for institutions, programs, and accrediting bodies to ensure successful educational outcomes (Bell et al., 2017). This move toward accountability was inconsistent with the G&P's emphasis on flexibility in defining, implementing, and assessing programs' goals and outcomes (Bell et al., 2017). In short, the CoA now had to demonstrate that programs ensured attainment of educational and training outcomes that were consistent with expectations of higher education accreditation.

Purpose and Aims of Study

Evaluating and improving their accreditation processes is a vital element in the APA-CoA's self-evaluative efforts. As part of these efforts, the present study examined training directors' perspectives on the value of the SoA (APA, 2022) accreditation processes, which is especially topical now that programs have fully transitioned from

the G&P processes (APA, 2006a). The specific aims of the study were to examine doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral residency training directors' perceptions of the importance of APA accreditation; the ways in which APA accreditation may improve programs; the usefulness of APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools; and their satisfaction with APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools. In addition, we examined whether perspectives on the value of APA accreditation differed between doctoral and internship training directors. To our knowledge, no published research has previously examined psychology training directors' perspectives on the value of the APA accreditation process.

Method

Survey Development and Description

In accordance with the APA-CoA's *Implementing Regulations A.1* (APA, 2006b) and *E.1-3* (APA, 2020), the CoA is to engage in examination of its work. Thus, during the July 2021 CoA meeting, APA accreditation staff and the CoA research workgroup (comprised of eight CoA commissioners) discussed the importance of collecting value perceptions from program training directors, examining their views of the SoA accreditation processes and practices, given their recent implementation. The research workgroup was then charged with developing a survey that identified the value of accreditation, identified strategies for quality improvement in the accreditation process, and assessed consumer satisfaction with accreditation processes. Moreover, it was suggested to the group that these items be examined separately for training directors at the different levels of education.

During the meeting and over the course of the next few months, members of the research workgroup developed the instrument, which was titled the *Accreditation Value Survey*. The survey included questions on the *importance* of APA accreditation; ways in which APA accreditation could be associated with program *improvement*; perceived *usefulness* of APA accreditation processes; and reported *satisfaction* with the CoA accreditation process. The research workgroup finalized the survey during the October 2021 CoA meeting and presented the survey to the CoA for approval to pilot test the survey for length and comprehensibility. A small group of former training directors and CoA commissioners, who were familiar with SoA processes and procedures, piloted the survey during November and December 2021.

During the February 2022 CoA meeting, the research workgroup discussed the feedback obtained from the pilot testing, which led to minor revisions in the wording of some items and a change in the order of Likert item scale ratings. Following this discussion, the research workgroup recommended that the survey be sent to program training directors in an online format. The CoA approved this request, and the survey was finalized. The APA Office of Research Ethics found the project exempt from review.

Procedure and Participants

On March 7, 2022, the survey was sent to 408 doctoral-level training directors, 641 internship training directors, and 103 postdoctoral residency training directors. Training directors were contacted using emails obtained from APA-CoA records, with two email reminders sent during the 3 weeks that the survey was

available. Training directors were informed that the survey would help the CoA and accreditation office evaluate the accreditation services they provided to programs. They were also informed that the survey was anonymous and were told to not add their name or other identifiable information to the survey.

Data were collected through Alchemer Survey software, which is a cloud-based online survey tool (Alchemer, 2023). Response rates were 26.4% (304/1152) for those initiating the survey and 21.8% (251/1152) for those who responded to the entire set of questions. When separated by educational level of the training program, response rates were 26.7% (109/408) for doctoral programs, 25.1% (161/641) for internship programs, and 26.2% (27/103) for postdoctoral residencies. Twelve participants responded to the survey who were training directors for both internships and postdoctoral residencies, and three participants did not identify an affiliated educational level. Data from these 15 participants and the postdoctoral residencies were included in overall analyses, but not the analyses that compared the views of doctoral training directors versus internship training directors.

Measures

The *Accreditation Value Survey*, found in the [Appendix](#), included items in four sections. First, four items assessed the importance of APA accreditation on a 5-point scale (1 = *not very important*; 5 = *very important*). Example items include “Rate the importance of APA’s recognition by the U.S. Department of Education” and “Rate the importance of APA’s accreditation allowing our graduates to more easily pursue licensure.”

Second, 21 items assessed possible ways in which APA accreditation improves programs on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Example items include “Having APA accreditation improves alignment of our program’s curricula with overall training aims” and “Having APA accreditation improves our program’s training in diversity.” At the end of these items, programs were given the opportunity to add comments in an open-ended format.

Third, 29 items assessed the usefulness of APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools. For each item, the training directors were asked to rate the usefulness of the item on a 5-point scale (1 = *not very useful*; 5 = *very useful*). Example accreditation review process items include “Application/submission of a self-study” and “Site visit.” Example APA accreditation training and consultation items include “CoA workshops for self-study completion” and “Individual program consultation from office staff.” There are also usefulness items pertaining to accreditation communications, the Annual Reporting Online (ARO), policies and practices regarding

accreditation fees and concerns, and general interactions with accreditation office staff.

Fourth, 29 items assessed the training directors’ satisfaction with APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools. These specific items are identical to the *usefulness* items, but instead of rating the usefulness of each item, the training directors were asked to rate their *satisfaction*, using a 5-point scale (1 = *not very satisfied*; 5 = *very satisfied*).

At the end of the survey, training directors were asked about the outcome of their most recent review (e.g., “accreditation was awarded to my program, with no reporting requirements”), whether the program was required to respond to concerns stemming from Annual Reporting (ARO) findings, and the year of their program’s most recent APA accreditation site visit. Finally, training directors were asked the open-ended question of, “Do you have any comments/suggestions to improve accreditation processes?”

Results

As noted earlier, although data from all training directors were included in the overall analyses, we also focused on the separate perspectives from the doctoral and internship training directors, given that the number of doctoral and internship programs from which we collected data far outnumbered the accredited postdoctoral residence programs from which we collected data. Moreover, although we separately examined usefulness of accreditation and satisfaction with accreditation, we also compared these findings to examine whether training directors find accreditation processes more useful than satisfying.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative survey data were analyzed by calculating means and standard deviations per item and by calculating overall means for the items in each of the survey’s four sections. [Table 1](#) shows the overall results for the survey items that examined the *importance* of APA accreditation, the results per doctoral and internship groups, and *t* and *d* statistics comparing responses from doctoral and internship program training directors. The overall findings indicated that program directors believed that APA accreditation serves important functions. For example, program directors rated holding APA accreditation was highly important to their program’s graduates’ ability to pursue licensure “more easily” and to pursue employment in specific settings requiring applicants who completed an accredited program. While training directors overall also identified the value of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation,

Table 1
Importance of APA Accreditation

Item	Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Doctoral	Internship	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
APA’s recognition by U.S. Department of Education	4.16 (1.01)	4.17 (1.18)	4.15 (0.88)	0.1	.92	.02
APA’s recognition by Council for Higher Education Accreditation	4.14 (0.96)	4.29 (0.99)	4.04 (0.93)	2.1	.04	.26
Allows grads to more easily pursue licensure	4.82 (0.57)	4.81 (0.66)	4.83 (0.51)	0.2	.85	.03
Allows grads to pursue employment in specific settings	4.73 (0.68)	4.66 (0.80)	4.77 (0.58)	1.3	.18	.17
Overall <i>M</i> of importance items	4.46 (0.60)	4.48 (0.70)	4.44 (0.52)	0.5	.60	.07

Note. Doctoral *n* = 108, Internship *n* = 157. APA = American Psychological Association.

doctoral training directors rated APA's recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as a significantly more important value than did internship training directors, $t(262) = 2.1$, $p = .04$, $d = .26$.

Table 2 shows the results for the *improvement* items. Training directors largely agreed that APA accreditation helped improve programs, notably as a useful tool for quality improvement and assurance efforts; for achieving better educational outcomes based on the integration of science and practice; for identifying and securing appropriate program resources; and for recruiting students and trainees. Moreover, program directors strongly agreed that APA accreditation publicly communicates the value of a program; demonstrates that the program was determined to be consistent with national training expectations; and demonstrates that the program voluntarily undertook activities to improve the program's quality of education. Of note, program directors were more mixed in their beliefs that accreditation improves quality of instruction, material resources, faculty and staff resources, instructor/supervisor qualifications, program climate, training in diversity, and efforts to achieve diversity. Finally, compared to doctoral training directors, internship directors more strongly agreed on the majority of improvement items, thus indicating that internship directors were more likely to believe that accreditation helped to improve their programs. For example, internship directors more strongly agreed that APA accreditation was a useful tool for quality improvement, $t(252) = 3.2$, $p < .01$, $d = .41$, and assurance efforts, $t(252) = 2.7$, $p < .01$, $d = .36$; improved quality of instruction, $t(244) = 2.8$, $p < .01$, $d = .36$, and assessment of

student learning, $t(243) = 2.8$, $p < .01$, $d = .37$; improved the program's alignment of curricula with overall training aims, $t(244) = 3.4$, $p < .001$, $d = .46$; and improved the content of program aims, $t(242) = 3.8$, $p < .001$, $d = .52$, program climate and culture, $t(243) = 3.4$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$, training in diversity, $t(241) = 3.8$, $p < .001$, $d = .50$, and efforts to achieve diversity, $t(262) = 3.2$, $p < .01$, $d = .41$. As indicated in Table 2, internship directors reported significantly greater overall scores on the improvement items compared to doctoral directors, $t(230) = 2.94$, $p < .01$, $d = .41$.

Table 3 shows the results for the *usefulness* items. Training directors largely found that APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools were useful. Training directors' views were especially positive in regard to the usefulness of their interactions with accreditation office staff: They strongly believed that their interactions with office staff were timely and that staff were professional, helpful, and accessible. In addition, training directors found individual consultation from staff to be useful, along with site visit reports, CoA workshops, and the eAccreditation Portal, the data management system used by the CoA. However, training directors' views regarding the usefulness of the complaint process, the appeals process, and having to annually report online (ARO) were more mixed. Although there were fewer significant group differences compared to the *improvement* items, internship directors did report significantly greater usefulness for the site visit report and response, $t(198) = 2.0$, $p = .044$, $d = .30$; eAccreditation Portal, $t(185) = 2.1$, $p = .036$, $d = .32$; and the complaint, $t(78) = 2.1$, $p = .035$, $d = .51$, and appeal processes, $t(73) = 3.3$, $p < .01$, $d = .80$.

Table 2
Ways in Which APA Accreditation Improves Programs

Item	Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Doctoral	Internship	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Achieve better educational outcomes through integration of science and practice	4.17 (0.92)	4.01 (1.05)	4.28 (0.81)	2.30	.022	.29
Useful tool for quality assurance efforts	4.29 (0.91)	4.10 (1.05)	4.43 (0.78)	2.68	.008	.36
Useful tool for quality improvement efforts	4.16 (0.92)	3.94 (1.03)	4.31 (0.81)	3.18	.002	.41
Useful tool for identifying, pursuing, and securing appropriate program resources	3.99 (1.08)	4.00 (1.10)	3.98 (1.07)	0.15	.883	.02
Useful tool for aligning educational activities with program aims	3.92 (0.97)	3.76 (1.08)	4.03 (0.87)	2.12	.035	.28
Continuous measurement of student performance is crucial in making quality program improvements	4.25 (0.83)	4.15 (0.92)	4.32 (0.76)	1.59	.112	.20
Holding accreditation publicly communicates value of program	4.62 (0.69)	4.56 (0.78)	4.66 (0.62)	1.15	.251	.15
Demonstrates that program is consistent with national training expectations	4.66 (0.67)	4.51 (0.83)	4.77 (0.50)	2.89	.004	.40
Demonstrates that program has voluntarily undertaken activities to improve quality of education	4.46 (0.79)	4.33 (0.93)	4.56 (0.64)	2.20	.029	.30
Accreditation improves content of program aims	3.57 (1.05)	3.26 (1.18)	3.78 (0.89)	3.78	.001	.52
Accreditation improves alignment of curricula with overall training aims	3.83 (1.00)	3.57 (1.14)	4.02 (0.84)	3.38	.001	.46
Accreditation improves quality of instruction	3.51 (1.09)	3.28 (1.16)	3.67 (1.02)	2.79	.006	.36
Accreditation improves monitoring of student performance	3.87 (0.94)	3.71 (1.04)	3.99 (0.84)	2.18	.030	.30
Accreditation improves assessing student learning	3.73 (0.94)	3.53 (1.00)	3.88 (0.87)	2.82	.005	.37
Accreditation improves material resources	3.30 (1.11)	3.24 (1.20)	3.35 (1.07)	0.80	.427	.10
Accreditation improves faculty and staff resources	3.53 (1.13)	3.51 (1.22)	3.55 (1.07)	0.29	.772	.04
Accreditation improves instructor/supervisor qualifications	3.55 (1.10)	3.41 (1.18)	3.64 (1.02)	1.64	.103	.21
Accreditation improves program climate and culture	3.48 (1.11)	3.21 (1.21)	3.68 (1.00)	3.35	.001	.43
Accreditation improves training in diversity	3.60 (1.09)	3.29 (1.14)	3.82 (1.00)	3.83	.001	.50
Accreditation improves efforts to achieve diversity	3.54 (1.12)	3.27 (1.17)	3.73 (1.05)	3.19	.002	.41
Accreditation improves recruitment of students/trainees	4.48 (0.88)	4.34 (1.01)	4.58 (0.77)	2.03	.044	.28
Overall <i>M</i> of agreement items	3.92 (0.70)	3.76 (0.80)	4.04 (0.59)	2.94	.004	.41

Note. Doctoral $n = 106$, Internship $n = 148$. APA = American Psychological Association.

Table 3*Usefulness of APA Accreditation Practices, Processes, and Tools*

Item	Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Doctoral	Internship	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
The accreditation review process						
Application/submission of a self-study	3.66 (1.13)	3.59 (1.14)	3.72 (1.12)	0.87	.385	.12
Preliminary review and response	3.59 (1.08)	3.51 (1.15)	3.65 (1.01)	0.95	.341	.14
Third party comment and response	3.37 (1.10)	3.26 (1.18)	3.45 (1.04)	1.09	.277	.17
Site visit	3.95 (1.04)	3.84 (1.18)	4.04 (0.91)	1.32	.190	.19
Site visit report and response	3.95 (1.02)	3.79 (1.17)	4.09 (0.87)	2.03	.044	.30
Commission review and correspondence	3.56 (1.11)	3.49 (1.15)	3.63 (1.08)	0.87	.388	.13
Timeline to receive a decision	3.09 (1.28)	2.94 (1.33)	3.21 (1.24)	1.43	.156	.21
APA accreditation training and consultation						
Online learning modules (Accreditation Consultation Training Program)	3.44 (1.07)	3.31 (1.18)	3.53 (0.99)	1.18	.242	.21
CoA workshops for self-study completion	4.02 (0.98)	4.07 (0.98)	3.99 (0.98)	0.51	.612	.08
Individual program consultation from staff	4.18 (1.04)	4.19 (1.04)	4.17 (1.05)	0.11	.909	.02
Accreditation communications						
Telephone communications with office staff	3.99 (1.09)	3.98 (1.16)	4.00 (1.05)	0.15	.879	.02
Annual reporting (requirements and process)	3.36 (1.05)	3.33 (1.08)	3.38 (1.03)	0.36	.717	.05
Substantive change notification	3.40 (1.01)	3.42 (1.02)	3.39 (1.01)	0.19	.853	.03
Public comment and notice	3.29 (0.98)	3.35 (1.00)	3.25 (0.97)	0.75	.457	.10
CoA <i>Update</i> (publication)	3.70 (0.88)	3.67 (0.95)	3.73 (0.84)	0.51	.614	.07
CoA <i>Update</i> presentations at convention and/or training council meetings	3.79 (1.05)	3.72 (1.15)	3.85 (0.95)	0.84	.405	.13
eAccreditation Portal	3.88 (1.06)	3.69 (1.17)	4.03 (0.95)	2.11	.036	.32
Written correspondence (paper and electronic letters)	3.67 (1.04)	3.60 (1.10)	3.73 (0.99)	0.89	.373	.12
Electronic mail communications (outside of letters)	3.89 (1.00)	3.75 (0.99)	3.99 (1.00)	1.76	.080	.24
Annual reporting online						
Data gathering	3.40 (1.08)	3.29 (1.15)	3.48 (1.01)	1.28	.204	.18
Data reporting/submission	3.33 (1.10)	3.26 (1.15)	3.39 (1.07)	0.90	.369	.12
Accreditation fees						
Billing practices (including timing, invoicing, and payment methods)	3.39 (1.00)	3.34 (1.01)	3.43 (1.00)	0.63	.530	.09
Fee structure (including application, site visit, and annual fees)	3.29 (1.01)	3.19 (1.04)	3.38 (0.99)	1.34	.182	.19
Accreditation concerns						
Complaint process	3.37 (1.26)	2.96 (1.34)	3.58 (1.17)	2.14	.035	.51
Appeals process	3.39 (1.26)	2.77 (1.39)	3.71 (1.06)	3.29	.002	.80
General interactions with accreditation office staff						
Professionalism	4.53 (0.73)	4.54 (0.82)	4.53 (0.66)	0.01	.957	.01
Helpfulness	4.34 (0.97)	4.33 (1.04)	4.35 (0.93)	0.10	.920	.02
Accessibility	4.18 (1.01)	4.22 (1.07)	4.16 (0.97)	0.40	.692	.06
Timeliness	4.16 (1.06)	4.26 (1.04)	4.08 (1.08)	1.23	.220	.17
Overall <i>M</i> of usefulness items	3.50 (0.87)	3.44 (1.11)	3.55 (0.69)	0.36	.722	.13

Note. Doctoral *n* = 98, Internship *n* = 128. APA = American Psychological Association; CoA = Commission on Accreditation.

Table 4 shows the results for the *satisfaction* items. Program directors reported similar findings regarding their satisfaction with accreditation practices, processes, and tools. For example, they were very satisfied with their interactions with office staff, individual program consultation from staff, site visit reports, and CoA workshops. On the other hand, they were less satisfied with the appeals process, the ARO, and the timeline to receive a decision.

Table 5 shows paired sample comparisons of *usefulness* versus *satisfaction* of accreditation practices, processes, and tools. When comparing scores, program directors reported significantly higher usefulness scores for the “application/submission of a self-study”, $t(211) = 3.4$, $p < .001$, $d = .23$. In other words, although program directors were not as satisfied with having to submit a self-study, they realized the usefulness of this undertaking. Similarly, program directors reported significantly greater usefulness for CoA workshops for self-study completion, $t(160) = 2.6$, $p = .011$, $d = .20$; individual program consultation from staff, $t(181) = 2.4$,

$p = .019$, $d = .18$; and use of the eAccreditation portal, $t(190) = 1.9$, $p = .06$, $d = .14$.

Finally, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to assess the association of *accreditation outcomes* and *ARO reporting* to the overall improvement, importance, usefulness, and satisfaction variables, and Spearman correlations were conducted to assess the association of *years since last site visit* to overall improvement, importance, usefulness, and satisfaction. None of these analyses yielded significant results.

Qualitative Findings

As noted earlier, the survey included an open-ended question regarding comments/suggestions to improve the accreditation processes. The responses to this question were analyzed collectively and not separated by program type. This analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic method (Guillen, 2019), which considers the context, history, and salience of the responses when

Table 4*Satisfaction With APA Accreditation Practices, Processes, and Tools*

Item	Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Doctoral	Internship	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
The accreditation review process						
Application/submission of a self-study	3.52 (1.20)	3.33 (1.31)	3.67 (1.10)	1.86	.065	.28
Preliminary review and response	3.65 (1.13)	3.60 (1.20)	3.69 (1.07)	0.54	.589	.08
Third party comment and response	3.56 (1.11)	3.53 (1.23)	3.59 (1.01)	0.33	.739	.06
Site visit	4.07 (1.05)	3.93 (1.15)	4.17 (0.97)	1.48	.140	.23
Site visit report and response	4.05 (1.03)	3.95 (1.11)	4.12 (0.96)	1.12	.265	.17
Commission review and correspondence	3.71 (1.16)	3.61 (1.22)	3.79 (1.11)	1.03	.304	.16
Timeline to receive a decision	3.28 (1.25)	3.14 (1.36)	3.39 (1.17)	1.33	.185	.21
APA accreditation training and consultation						
Online learning modules (Accreditation Consultation Training Program)	3.57 (1.00)	3.58 (1.11)	3.56 (0.92)	0.06	.957	.02
CoA workshops for self-study completion	3.95 (1.01)	4.00 (1.04)	3.92 (0.99)	0.50	.620	.08
Individual program consultation from staff	4.03 (1.05)	4.07 (1.03)	4.00 (1.07)	0.42	.679	.08
Accreditation communications						
Telephone communications with office staff	4.14 (1.07)	4.12 (1.16)	4.16 (0.99)	0.26	.792	.04
Annual reporting (requirements and process)	3.51 (1.09)	3.42 (1.08)	3.59 (1.10)	1.10	.271	.16
Substantive change notification	3.53 (1.09)	3.43 (1.12)	3.59 (1.07)	0.95	.343	.15
Public comment and notice	3.48 (1.05)	3.44 (1.07)	3.51 (1.05)	0.47	.637	.07
CoA <i>Update</i> (publication)	3.70 (0.97)	3.72 (1.00)	3.68 (0.95)	0.26	.797	.04
CoA <i>Update</i> presentations at convention and/or training council meetings	3.89 (0.96)	3.91 (1.00)	3.87 (0.94)	0.25	.800	.04
eAccreditation Portal	3.74 (1.11)	3.60 (1.19)	3.86 (1.03)	1.49	.140	.23
Written correspondence (paper and electronic letters)	3.68 (1.10)	3.59 (1.11)	3.74 (1.10)	0.96	.340	.14
Electronic mail communications (outside of letters)	3.83 (1.06)	3.70 (1.07)	3.92 (1.05)	1.46	.147	.21
Annual reporting online						
Data gathering	3.38 (1.11)	3.26 (1.15)	3.46 (1.08)	1.26	.208	.18
Data reporting/submission	3.40 (1.14)	3.38 (1.17)	3.41 (1.12)	0.23	.818	.03
Accreditation fees						
Billing practices (including timing, invoicing, and payment methods)	3.60 (1.05)	3.54 (1.10)	3.64 (1.01)	0.64	.524	.09
Fee structure (including application, site visit, and annual fees)	3.48 (1.04)	3.38 (1.13)	3.57 (0.96)	1.27	.205	.18
Accreditation concerns						
Complaint process	3.43 (1.23)	3.04 (1.30)	3.68 (1.13)	1.99	.051	.53
Appeals process	3.34 (1.30)	2.80 (1.47)	3.64 (1.10)	2.42	.019	.68
General interactions with accreditation office staff						
Professionalism	4.52 (0.77)	4.54 (0.85)	4.50 (0.70)	0.37	.712	.05
Helpfulness	4.31 (1.02)	4.36 (1.06)	4.28 (0.99)	0.53	.607	.08
Accessibility	4.21 (1.04)	4.26 (1.12)	4.16 (0.97)	0.70	.488	.10
Timeliness	4.19 (1.04)	4.32 (1.02)	4.08 (1.04)	1.63	.105	.23
Overall <i>M</i> of satisfaction items	3.39 (1.06)	3.40 (1.01)	3.39 (1.12)	0.03	.978	.01

Note. Doctoral *n* = 91, Internship *n* = 120. APA = American Psychological Association; CoA = Commission on Accreditation.

finding, interpreting, and articulating meaning in the qualitative data.

Training directors stated that while requirements are added to accreditation processes, other requirements are rarely removed. They suggested removing requirements when new ones are added to prevent the requirements and accompanying workload from increasing. They also noted that training directors, when comparing notes with their colleagues, perceived disparities in the way their accreditation efforts were evaluated by the CoA. They therefore asked for greater consistency in the evaluation process. Training directors also requested more timely reviews of substantive changes, although they acknowledged that this may have been a function of the COVID-19 pandemic and there were other suggestions that seemed to be primarily related to the effects of the pandemic on timeliness. The dearth of site visitors, particularly site visit chairs, was apparent to the training directors. They stated that additional site visitors would improve the quality and timeliness of site visits. Another broadly endorsed suggestion was to reduce the redundancies in the self-study and ARO and some training directors

provided examples of these redundancies. Finally, some training directors asked for more specific feedback in the evaluation process. They noted that when they are told that something is wrong with their self-study, they would prefer more specific feedback on how to remedy the problem.

Discussion

In general, training directors acknowledged the overall value of accreditation. In particular, they noted the benefits of quality assurance, consistency with national expectations for training across programs, and facilitation of licensure and employment prospects for students. They also recognized that accreditation enhances their efforts to communicate the quality of their program to applicants and other public stakeholders and that it improves the recruitment of students and trainees.

The benefits of accreditation seemed to be more salient to internship training directors than they were to doctoral training directors, however. Doctoral directors were significantly less likely

Table 5*Comparisons of Usefulness Versus Satisfaction With APA Accreditation Practices, Processes, and Tools*

Item	Usefulness <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Satisfaction <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
The accreditation review process					
Application/submission of a self-study	3.74 (1.11)	3.55 (1.18)	3.40	.001	.23
Preliminary review and response	3.61 (1.10)	3.67 (1.11)	1.02	.308	.07
Third party comment and response	3.48 (1.11)	3.56 (1.09)	1.17	.245	.10
Site visit	3.99 (1.06)	4.05 (1.05)	1.20	.234	.08
Site visit report and response	3.98 (1.03)	4.03 (1.05)	0.88	.381	.06
Commission review and correspondence	3.61 (1.11)	3.72 (1.13)	2.05	.042	.15
Timeline to receive a decision	3.08 (1.28)	3.29 (1.23)	3.53	.001	.25
APA accreditation training and consultation					
Online learning modules (Accreditation Consultation Training Program)	3.56 (1.04)	3.59 (0.97)	0.65	.519	.06
CoA workshops for self-study completion	4.06 (0.97)	3.94 (1.00)	2.58	.011	.20
Individual program consultation from staff	4.16 (1.04)	4.03 (1.04)	2.36	.019	.18
Accreditation communications					
Telephone communications with office staff	4.07 (1.07)	4.15 (1.08)	1.43	.155	.11
Annual reporting (requirements and process)	3.35 (1.06)	3.52 (1.10)	3.39	.001	.22
Substantive change notification	3.41 (1.02)	3.56 (1.09)	2.67	.008	.19
Public comment and notice	3.36 (1.00)	3.51 (1.05)	2.73	.007	.19
CoA <i>Update</i> (publication)	3.70 (0.96)	3.72 (0.96)	0.42	.678	.03
CoA <i>Update</i> presentations at convention and/or training council meetings	3.82 (1.02)	3.93 (0.97)	2.21	.029	.17
eAccreditation portal	3.87 (1.08)	3.78 (1.09)	1.89	.060	.14
Written correspondence (paper and electronic letters)	3.71 (1.03)	3.73 (1.07)	0.46	.645	.03
Electronic mail communications (outside of letters)	3.93 (0.99)	3.87 (1.03)	1.32	.187	.09
Annual reporting online					
Data gathering	3.38 (1.09)	3.38 (1.11)	0.00	.999	.00
Data reporting/submission	3.31 (1.13)	3.41 (1.12)	2.04	.043	.13
Accreditation fees					
Billing practices (including timing, invoicing, and payment methods)	3.38 (1.02)	3.57 (1.06)	4.37	.001	.30
Fee structure (including application, site visit, and annual fees)	3.32 (0.99)	3.49 (1.04)	3.97	.001	.27
Accreditation concerns					
Complaint process	3.40 (1.35)	3.49 (1.22)	1.29	.203	.16
Appeals process	3.32 (1.38)	3.39 (1.23)	0.89	.375	.11
General interactions with accreditation office staff					
Professionalism	4.55 (0.71)	4.52 (0.75)	1.00	.318	.07
Helpfulness	4.34 (0.98)	4.32 (0.99)	0.55	.580	.04
Accessibility	4.17 (1.04)	4.22 (1.02)	1.47	.146	.10
Timeliness	4.14 (1.08)	4.19 (1.02)	1.38	.169	.09
Overall means	3.48 (0.90)	3.46 (0.91)	0.34	.736	.08

Note. *n* = 241. APA = American Psychological Association; CoA = Commission on Accreditation.

to identify accreditation as beneficial for aligning educational activities with program aims, improving content of program aims, and improving alignment of curricula with program aims. In addition, doctoral directors were significantly less likely to identify accreditation as improving program climate and culture, training in diversity, and efforts to achieve diversity. The CoA should consider whether alterations in the SoA are needed given that highlighting the importance of developing program aims (rather than emphasizing individual program's training models) and an increased focus on issues of diversity were—as noted earlier—some of the key points of emphasis in the development of the SoA (Bell et al., 2017). Doctoral program directors' perceptions of lower benefits for accreditation may reflect the greater complexity inherent in doctoral training. It may also stem from many doctoral programs having been accredited for numerous years, which may result in a lower likelihood of well-established programs using accreditation in an informative manner.

Training directors' acknowledgment of the overall value of accreditation was tempered somewhat by their concerns about

specific aspects of accreditation. In Cohen's (2019) discussion about the importance of APA accreditation, he mentions some of the costs of accreditation. For example, he mentions that the process of accreditation may be stressful, given that becoming accredited may involve significant time and resources and programs going up for accreditation or reaccreditation may already be "stretched thin." In the present study, there is some evidence that training directors perceive the accreditation process as arduous. For example, training directors reported that applying for accreditation through the submission of a self-study was significantly more useful than satisfying. In addition, as mentioned earlier, training directors reported relatively lower satisfaction (compared to other accreditation processes) with having to annually report program data online (ARO). As also noted earlier, training directors generally perceived accreditation as a more useful tool for quality assurance, integration of science and practice, and for securing appropriate program resources in contrast to a tool for improving quality of instruction, faculty and staff resources, and instructor/supervisor qualifications. It may thus be the case that some training directors

believe that APA accreditation is not associated with the quality of the actual *training* that programs provide.

Some of our qualitative data also speak to such issues. While a few training directors failed to see much value in accreditation and were broadly critical, most respondents couched their criticisms and suggestions as caveats. They seemed to be saying, “accreditation is generally valuable, but,” followed by their criticism or suggestion, with many of these reflecting a preference for a simpler, more streamlined accreditation process. As mentioned, some training directors recommended removing requirements any time new requirements are added and further recommended eliminating redundancies in the self-study and ARO. They also expressed frustration with situational issues over which the CoA had relatively little control—for example, accreditation processes being delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. (In response to the delays stemming from the pandemic, the CoA conducted virtual site visits from 2020 to 2022 and allowed accredited programs with site visit delays to maintain their accreditation status.)

Despite some frustrations with the accreditation process, training directors appeared to be very appreciative of the resources available to help them with the accreditation process. They noted that training workshops, online resources, and the portal were especially helpful. Some were particularly positive about the APA Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation staff and the help they have received from them.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the overall sample for the present study was statistically robust, the study had a relatively low response rate, and it is unclear whether and how survey responders differed from nonresponders. Although group comparisons did not include postdoctoral training directors, the relatively small number of accredited postdoctoral programs may reflect the notion that having accreditation status for postdoctoral programs is not as critical as it is for doctoral and internship programs. Moreover, because of the lack of data regarding the types of program (scientist-practitioner, clinical science, etc.) at which training directors worked, there is the chance that the present findings are not entirely representative of all training directors and types of programs. In addition, because HSP programs may be accredited by other accrediting organizations—for example, the Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System and the Canadian Psychological Association Accreditation Panel—the present findings should not be generalized to training directors’ perspectives of other accrediting organizations. Also, the study was not an independent assessment as it was designed and conducted by the CoA itself, and the positive valence of the survey items (e.g., use of the words “importance” and “usefulness”) and the potential for power dynamics (given the impact of accreditation status on programs and students) may have influenced survey responses. Given that the length of the survey may have negatively influenced training directors’ willingness to complete the survey, future surveys assessing accreditation values should consider using a more streamlined measure. Future research should also consider assessing accreditation perspectives in other impacted groups such as faculty, graduate students, interns, and postdoctoral fellows. It is also recommended that a similar survey be given to training directors in 5–10 years. This would allow the CoA to examine changes

in perceptions of APA accreditation value once programs have become completely familiar with the SoA and in response to any changes made to the SoA by the CoA. Finally, if accreditation quality improvement strategies are implemented, it is recommended that the CoA monitor the effectiveness of these changes over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results from the survey show that training directors in HSP generally value APA accreditation and see its benefits for their programs. It also highlights the trade-offs these training directors experience in the accreditation process. Their suggestions for improving the process are worthy of consideration by the APA-CoA commissioners and the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation staff. In particular, the APA-CoA might undertake an evaluation of redundancies in the information provided by programs and work to eliminate them. The APA-CoA might also consider how to better elucidate perceived redundancies where necessary (e.g., the purpose behind obtaining ARO data and how these data are important—as they can be used, e.g., by prospective students in their examination of programs). Likewise, the APA-CoA might look for ways to reduce the overall workload of accreditation by eliminating tasks and requests that have limited relevance to the accreditation process. In addition, the APA-CoA might consider ways to amplify their ongoing efforts to recruit site visitors and their calibration assessments of program evaluations to help ensure greater consistency in the evaluation process. Finally, given the positive response the training directors had to personal interactions with the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation staff and commissioners in training settings, the APA-CoA might look for ways to increase personal interactions that support training directors in the accreditation process.

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Appendix

Accreditation Value Survey

Dear Training Director

Please complete this questionnaire to help the CoA and accreditation office evaluate accreditation services provided to programs. All responses will remain anonymous. Do not add your name or other identifiable information to this questionnaire. We will not download or retain Internet Protocol addresses. If you have any questions or concerns about this request, contact our office by emailing apaacred@apa.org or calling 202.336.5979.

Yours Sincerely,
Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation

What level of training are you a director for?

- Doctoral
- Internship
- Postdoctoral

1. Value of APA Accreditation

1. Rate the importance (1 = *not very important*, 5 = *very important*) of each of these potential values of APA accreditation:
 - a. ____ APA's recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.
 - b. ____ APA's recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.
 - c. ____ APA accreditation allows our graduates to more easily pursue licensure.
 - d. ____ APA accreditation allows our graduates to pursue employment in specific settings that require completion of an accredited program.

If there are other values of APA Accreditation, please list them here:

2. Rate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *is strongly disagree*, 5 = *is strongly agree*):
 - a. ____ Accreditation serves a useful purpose that helps our students/trainees achieve better educa-

tional outcomes through the integration of science and practice.

- b. ____ Accreditation is a useful tool for our quality assurance efforts.
- c. ____ Accreditation is a useful tool for our quality improvement efforts.
- d. ____ Accreditation is a useful tool for identifying, pursuing, and securing appropriate resources for our program.
- e. ____ Accreditation is a useful tool for aligning our educational activities with our program aims.
- f. ____ Continuous measurement of student performance is crucial in making quality improvements in our program.
- g. ____ Holding accreditation publicly communicates the value of our program.
- h. ____ Accreditation demonstrates that our program is consistent with national expectations for training health service psychologists.
- i. ____ Accreditation demonstrates that our program has voluntarily undertaken activities designed to improve the quality of the education our program delivers.
- j. Having APA Accreditation improves:
 - ____ Content of our program aims
 - ____ Alignment of our program's curricula with overall training aims
 - ____ Quality of instruction in our program
 - ____ Methods of monitoring student performance in our program
 - ____ Methods assessing student learning in our program

___ Material resources (e.g., facilities, equipment, technology) used in our program

___ Faculty and staff resources dedicated to our program

___ Instructor/supervisor qualifications for our program

___ Our program climate and culture

___ Our program's training in diversity

___ Efforts to achieve diversity

___ Recruitment of students/trainees

Comments:

2. Rate the usefulness of the following APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools (1 = *not very useful*, 5 = *very useful*). If you have no experience, then use "N/A."

The accreditation review process:

___ Application/submission of a self-study

___ Preliminary review and response

___ Third party comment and response

___ Site visit

___ Site visit report and response

___ Commission review and correspondence

___ Timeline to receive a decision

APA accreditation training and consultation:

___ Online learning modules (Accreditation Consultation Training Program)

___ CoA workshops for self-study completion

___ Individual program consultation from office staff

Accreditation communications:

___ Telephone communication with office staff

___ Annual reporting (requirements and process)

___ Substantive change notification

___ Public comment and notice

___ CoA Update

___ CoA Update presentations at convention and/or training council meetings

___ eAccreditation Portal

___ Written correspondence (paper and electronic letters)

___ Electronic mail communications (outside of letters)

ARO:

___ Data gathering

___ Data reporting/submission

Accreditation fees:

___ Billing practices (including timing, invoicing, and payment methods)

___ Fee structure (including application, site visit, and annual fees)

Accreditation concerns:

___ Complaint process

___ Appeals process

General interactions with accreditation office staff:

___ Professionalism

___ Helpfulness

___ Accessibility

___ Timeliness

3. Rate your satisfaction with the following APA accreditation practices, processes, and tools (1 = *not very satisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*). If you have no experience, then use "N/A."

The accreditation review process:

___ Application/submission of a self-study

___ Preliminary review and response

___ Third party comment and response

___ Site visit

___ Site visit report and response

___ Commission review and correspondence

___ Timeline to receive a decision

APA accreditation training and consultation:

___ Online learning modules (Accreditation Consultation Training Program)

___ CoA workshops for self-study completion

___ Individual program consultation from office staff

Accreditation communications:

___ Telephone communication with office staff

- ☐ Annual reporting (requirements and process)
☐ Substantive change notification
☐ Public comment and notice
☐ CoA Update
☐ CoA Update presentations at convention and/or training council meetings
☐ eAccreditation Portal
☐ Written correspondence (article and electronic letters)
☐ Electronic mail communications (outside of letters)

ARO:

- ☐ Data gathering
☐ Data reporting/submission

Accreditation fees:

- ☐ Billing practices (including timing, invoicing, and payment methods)
☐ Fee structure (including application, site visit, and annual fees)

Accreditation concerns:

- ☐ Complaint process
☐ Appeals process

General interactions with accreditation office staff:

- ☐ Professionalism
☐ Helpfulness
☐ Accessibility
☐ Timeliness

4. In your most recent review, which of the following occurred:

☐ Accreditation was awarded to my program, with no reporting requirements.

☐ Accreditation was awarded to my program, with at least one reporting requirement.

☐ A decision was deferred pending an additional response (Defer for Information or Defer for Show Cause).

☐ Other action (Extend Contingency, Accredited on Probation, Accredited, Inactive)

☐ Required to respond to concerns stemming from (ARO) findings

☐ Prefer not to answer

☐ Do not know

5. Was the program you required to respond to concerns stemming from (ARO) findings?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

6. What year was your program's most recent APA site visit?

☐ 2022
☐ 2021
☐ 2020
☐ 2019
☐ 2018
☐ 2017
☐ 2016
☐ 2015
☐ 2014

7. Do you have any comments/suggestions to improve accreditation processes?

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