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MONTANA Professor

4 CRITICAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
8 FOCUS ON TEACHING
12 CURRENT RESEARCH
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DEVELOPING BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS IN MONTANA AND BEYOND THROUGH THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Cheryl A. Young-Pelton
Assistant Professor of Special Education, Montana State University Billings

IN THE INAUGURAL ISSUE of the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, Baer, Wolf and Risley (1968) laid the groundwork for a new direction in applied psychology and learning. Back then, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)—evidence-based treatment for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and other serious conditions—was a profession in its infancy, dedicated to improving lives through socially valid measures and carefully distinguishing application from the experimental or conceptual analysis of behavior. Forty-five years later, ABA is recognized worldwide as a scientifically researched method for behavioral. In a 2011 survey of certified individuals, the largest number of BCBAs (81%) reported working in the field of disabilities: autism (54%), developmental disabilities (24%), and special education—general (13%) (BACB, 2011).

Because ABA is especially effective when implemented as an early intensive behavioral intervention for young children, the demand for treatment is increasing rapidly, requiring the planning and supervision of a services of Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB), the profession’s credentialing body, announced in September, 2011—just thirteen years after its inception—that their numbers for the first time had exceeded 10,000 certificates, issued worldwide. However, during the same period, Montana had only four behavior analysts credentialed by the Board (BACB, 2011).

The road to becoming a behavior analyst traverses three stages for the graduate student: (a) training in one of over 170 approved university programs around the world, (b) extensive candidate supervision from either a university program or a BCBA and (c) a certifying professional exam (BACB, 2012). The BACB administers examinations three times a year in over 200 sites in the US and over 150 sites internationally.

University programs in behavior analysis are typically taught on campus versus online. Of the 27 programs offering an approved sequence of courses for certification in either an online or distance format, only six include the supervision necessary to apply for the professional exam. In addition, no programs for behavior analysis training are offered in states or provinces that border Montana. The nearest programs, whether on campus or online, are more than 500 miles away—in Washington, Colorado, Utah, and Minnesota.

BACB Approved Training
Montana State University Billings established its sequence of approved BACB courses in 2009. Six months later, a supervised internship component was added. All courses in the sequence are offered online and the supervision requirement is also available for distance students. Critically, it is the intensive use of technology that has made this program highly successful.

Online Coursework
MSU Billings offers an approved sequence of six courses in a two-year rotation over six terms. Each course is three credits and meets the BACB Task List objectives. Courses are designed in modules that incorporate a variety of learning experiences including video presentations, audio lectures, study guides, vocabulary games, real-world projects, case studies, presentations, discussions, quizzes, and tests. The modules are designed to support non-traditional students who balance professional and family responsibilities with their educational pursuits.

Student evaluations from online ABA courses have been positive (semester averages are near 4.5 or higher, on a 1-to-5 scale). Written comments on course evaluations have also tended to be positive. Of course, online learning is not for everyone, but for students who want an online experience with the convenience of learning from their home or work computer, these courses meet the need.

Intensive Practicum
The supervision requirements of the BACB Intensive Practicum are met through the 5-credit MSU Billings course, Internship in ABA. In order to meet the required number of supervised hours, a candidate for certification must take the internship three times. Student interns conduct behavior analytic activities for 250 hours a semester with appropriate clients in
a site where they have direct supervision. The university provides a BCBA to supervise the intern twice weekly for a minimum of 25 hours a semester—an average of about 1.5 hours per meeting (See Table 1). For students who live near campus, the supervisor goes to the practicum site, or the student can go to the supervisor’s office. For distance/online students, all course exchanges—discussions on competencies, case studies, video samples, etc.—are conducted through the secure campus online system Desire2Learn. Real-time weekly meetings are accomplished via webcam.

**INTERNSHIP SUPERVISION (BACB INTENSIVE PRACTICUM) REQUIREMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Semester</th>
<th>Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of qualifying hours logged by intern</td>
<td>250 hours</td>
<td>18-22 hours (but no fewer than 10 hours and no more than 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision contacts</td>
<td>28 contacts</td>
<td>Twice weekly (min.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of supervision</td>
<td>25 hours minimum</td>
<td>1.5 or more hours (10% of logged hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Internship Placements.**

Of the 42 students who have taken Internship in ABA since it began in 2009, only 8 (19%) had local placements in the Billings area. The remaining internship sites have been an hour or more away from Billings. Seventeen distance internships were provided within Montana and sixteen involved placements in 13 other states. Distance internships were arranged by the graduate student and then approved by the program on a case-by-case basis after contact with the site supervisor. In most instances, graduate students worked full- or part-time at the agency or school where they conducted internship activities. Qualifying activities for internship must include:

- Conducting assessments related to the need for behavioral intervention;
- Designing, implementing, and systematically monitoring skill-acquisition and behavior-reduction programs;
- Oversight of the implementation of behavior-analytic programs by others;
- Training, designing behavioral systems, and performance management;
- Attending meetings regarding the behavior analytic program, researching the relevant literature, and talking to individuals about the program.

Interns worked with a variety of individuals in different settings. The BACB requires that clients be persons for whom behavior-analytic services are appropriate as long as the supervisee is not related to the client and is not the client's primary caretaker. Supervisees must work with multiple clients during the experience period. Settings for internships have been in schools, agencies, residential treatment centers, and clinics (See Table 2). Twenty-three interns were employed in public schools, thirteen worked for agencies providing autism treatment, nine had clinical placements, and five worked in residential centers—some with more than one placement over the three semesters of internship.

**TYPES OF INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT, FOR DISTANCE AND LOCAL SITES (2009-2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary or Alternative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>EIBI/Autism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Treatment</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental Disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|               |               | 11   | 38       | 49    |
Good Results

With the crucial support of our Instructional Technology (IT) Department, online supervision meetings have been productive and helpful for students in the program. This is evidenced in internship course surveys. In addition, advance planning helps prepare for potential technical problems with intern who have difficulty with either their equipment or high-speed internet connections.

In a study of distance versus local supervision by this author and two previous interns in the program, interactions and exchanges in online and face-to-face supervision were coded and summarized for analysis. Local supervision was conducted primarily on campus or in the school classroom. Distance supervision was conducted in the practicum setting via webcam, e-mail, and phone conferencing. The study generated results showing virtually no difference in the quantity or quality of supervised experience—although the dependability of technology made quite a difference in whether or not weekly webcam meetings were considered successful (Young-Pelton, Yarbrough, & Russell, in review)

Conclusion

As the field of behavior analysis continues to grow, online educational programs and distance internship opportunities will be necessary to meet the needs of students where they live and work—every remote area, underdeveloped service region, and rural community. At the same time, distance supervision of pre-service behavior analysts will continue to depend on reliable communication via secure web conferencing technology supported by the university IT Department. In addition, high-speed internet connections, webcam, video and audio technology in classrooms, agencies, residential treatment centers, and clinics will certainly expand their capabilities to connect with university programs. These ongoing improvements will meet the needs of graduate interns in distant locations. Supervision of graduate interns in behavior analysis can be accomplished easily when appropriate technology is available and when secure, reliable connections are made.
What impact has the MSU-B ABA program had on Montana?

As reported earlier, there were 4 behavior analysts with BACB credentials in 2011. In 2013, Montana now boasts 14 credentialed BCBA. We are proud to say that 72% of Montana’s behavior analysts have ties with the ABA program, and 7 of Montana’s recently credentialed behavior analysts have completed the program at MSU Billing. This program is off and running well.

References


Figure 2. Behavior Analyst Intern

Sammie Bushman meets with Dr. Young-Pelton via WebEx® to discuss collaborative research on a video self-modeling project in her classroom for students with Emotional Disturbance.

The multiple baseline design study was planned during internship to improve learner behaviors during reading group instruction. In the graph, the blue series depicts an improvement in attending behaviors during reading group instruction and the red data path shows a decrease in maladaptive behaviors.

The shared file of raw data in this photo is directed by the intern from her Macintosh® laptop computer in her classroom using WebEx® application sharing mode for MS Office 2008 Excel®. Dr. Young-Pelton scheduled the meeting and supervised her from her home office; her computer was a Dell® desktop PC.