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School Psychology Practice and Job Satisfaction

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Psychology Honor's Thesis

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**Abstract**

School Psychology as a profession has been shown in numerous studies to be characteristic of high job satisfaction. There are many factors that influence job satisfaction. This study was concerned with the roles of school psychologists in Minnesota and whether a discrepancy in actual and desired roles may effect job satisfaction. "Survey of the Professional Practices of Minnesota School Psychologists" was distributed to practicing school psychologists in Minnesota through an email with a URL link. The on-line survey contained questions concerning demographics, practices (actual/desired), adequacy of training program, barriers, and job satisfaction. This study analyzed the relationships between practices and job satisfaction. The results of this survey study gave evidence that a predictive relationship between practices and job satisfaction does exist.

**School Psychology Practice and Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction has been a highlight of research across a majority of professions. Commitment, motivation, performance on the job, productivity, absenteeism, attitude, burnout and achievement are all linked to how satisfied one is with their profession (Worrell, Skaggs & Brown, 2006). It is evident in countless publications that, overall, school psychology as a profession is satisfying to very satisfying. A few variables associated with influencing job satisfaction in school psychologists include relationships with coworkers, compensation, opportunity for advancement, and school policies (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). Little research has been done investigating actual and desired practices and its influence on job satisfaction. This paper examines the results of an online survey distributed to practicing school psychologists in the state of Minnesota. It explores the predictive relationship of actual and desired practices and its effect on job satisfaction.

### *Practices*

The practices of school psychologists today are very traditional with assessment activities consuming most of their time (Merrell, Ervin & Gimpel, 2006; Reschy & Wilson, 1995; Worrell et al., 2006). Research shows that the majority of practicing school psychologists would like to get away from this traditional emphasis and concentrate on more intervention, consultation, and research aspects of the profession (Worrell et al., 2006).

Previous research has confirmed a distinct discrepancy between actual and desired practices. The area of practice with the largest disparity is assessment with practitioners reporting spending 46% of their time in this activity compared to an ideal of 32% (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

They also are working 22% of the time in intervention, 16% in consultation, and one percent performing research (Bramlett et al., 2002). Their desired percentages in these activities have been reported by Reschly and Wilson to be 28%, 33%, and seven percent respectively (1995).

Based on current research school psychologists desire to practice more widespread psychological and educational services in schools (Merrell et al., 2006). Many school psychologists have promoted role expansion and a changing of these traditional roles. However, large caseloads and high school psychologist-to-student ratios make role expansion difficult for them (Levinson, 1990; Merrell et al., 2006). Also, regulations by all levels of government call for assessment services for those who qualify, yet again are making role diversity a complicated option (Levinson, 1990).

School psychology was developed from special education and therefore is governed by this area (Merrell et al., 2006). There is hope that as special education changes, school psychology as a profession will begin to shift its focus. Ideally school psychologists would prefer to put less emphasis on the little problems, such as assessing one child, and in turn concentrate on larger, more system wide areas of concern (Merrell et al., 2006; Shapiro, 2000).

As eluded to above, individual-level treatment describes the traditional, child-centered approach to service delivery (Idsoe, 2006). The alternative is a more current version of service delivery, systemic-level prevention which includes system wide intervention to prevent possible future problems (Idsoe, 2006). Idsoe (2006) found that, unlike individual-level treatment, systemic-level prevention was positively correlated to job satisfaction and other job attitudes. It is suggested that systemic-level prevention is a

better service delivery method, more productive, and is also favored by those implementing it (Felner, Favazza, Shim, Brand, Gu & Noonan, 2001). Therefore, it is encouraging that the profession is beginning to move toward a more systemic-level prevention service delivery model.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Only 51% of the American workforce is satisfied with their job (O'Neill, 2002). In contrast approximately 85% of school psychologists are satisfied or very satisfied with their job, intend to stay in the profession, and do not regret their occupational decision (Resschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell et al., 2006). Research has not always shed such a positive light on school psychology job satisfaction. In 1982 the first national study concerning school psychology job satisfaction showed 16 percent of the sample experienced dissatisfaction and the intent to leave their profession (Anderson et al., 1984). Although Anderson and his colleagues found school psychologists job satisfaction to be high, it was comparable to the general American workforce (1984).

More recent research suggests school psychologists are satisfied with numerous aspects of the job including social service, congruency of moral values, independence, co-workers, and opportunities to stay busy on the job (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell et al., 2006). Current studies have also unveiled that school psychologists are more satisfied than in the past with compensation, achievement, job security, working conditions, and colleagues (Worrell et al., 2006). Aspects that tend to cause dissatisfaction come with every job no matter how satisfying the profession is. School system guidelines and procedures, and the lack of advancement opportunities within the

profession are both sources of dissatisfaction for school psychologists throughout the United States (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell et al., 2006). The areas that lay under the dissatisfaction heading are ones that practitioners have a perceived lack of control over (Worrell et al., 2006).

While research studies have often only been inclusive of one state, levels of satisfaction still seem to be consistent across the United States when they are compared. For example, 84% of school psychologists in Virginia are satisfied or very satisfied with their job situation, similarly 85% in Pennsylvania, and 80% in North Carolina (Levinson, 1983; Levinson, 1989; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; South, 1990). This was also shown by a study done by Worrell et al. where National Association of School Psychologists members were surveyed throughout the United States and uncovered results paralleled those of previous studies (2006).

### *Practice and Job Satisfaction*

Research investigating these two variables has found that individuals still report being moderately satisfied even though they have a discrepancy between their actual and ideal practices (Merrell et. al, 2006). Additionally, VanVoorhis & Levinson found that role diversity was linked to being more satisfied with school psychology as a profession (2006). However, a direct causal relationship was unable to be obtained between these two variables (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

Although some research has been done in this area, it is warranted to continue to explore the unknown possible relationship between actual and ideal practices and job satisfaction. There are indications that a re-examination of the role of the school psychologist and a shift away from traditional practices needs to take place. The purpose

of this study is to examine the predictive relationship between actual and ideal practices of practicing school psychologists in the state of Minnesota and their effects on job satisfaction.

Considering the existing research on both practices and job satisfaction it seems reasonable to assume the proposed hypothesis: The degree of the discrepancy between actual and desired practices predicts job satisfaction. This study analyzed the predictive power of the discrepancies in relation to job satisfaction by arranging them as predictors by practice category (i.e., assessment, intervention, etc.) and via a separate analysis in which the five highest discrepancy categories were used as predictors.

## Method

### *Participants*

Two main criteria narrowed down the sample. Participants were recruited on the basis of being a practicing school psychologist in the state of Minnesota and also whether contact information was available. Submission of the survey was considered the school psychologists' informed consent to participate in the study; they were not compensated for their participation. Based on knowledge of the email list, approximately 430 eligible individuals had the opportunity to participate in this survey. One hundred and fifty two of those eligible completed the survey. This equaled out to an approximate response rate of 28%-35%. Of those 152 participants, 29.1% were males and 70.9% were females. 96% of the population was white, 1.3% Asian, 0.7 % American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.7% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 0.7% some other race and 0.7% two or more races. 34.4% of the individuals were between the ages of 30 and 39 years old, 25.8% 50-59, 21.2 % 40-49, 16.6 % 24-29, and 2% percent were 60 years of age and over. Eleven to

20 was the peak number of years in service with 29.6% of practicing school psychologists, 22.4 % 6-10 years, 17.8 % 3-5 years, 15.8 % 21-30, 10.5 1-2 years, and 3.9% had been practicing for 30 years or more. A large percentage, 64%, received a salary between \$40,000 and \$59,000, 29.9% had a salary of \$60,000 or more, and 6 % had a salary of 39,000 or less.

### *Materials*

The Survey of the Professional Practices of Minnesota School Psychologists was designed to take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. Items were largely influenced by and based on similar research done by Hosp and Reschly (2002) and Reschly and Wilson (1995). The survey contained forty questions broken down into five sections: demographics, practices, barriers, job satisfaction, and response-to-intervention. The current study analyzed the data from the practices and job satisfaction sections.

*Practices.* The practices section of the survey contained items inquiring about the actual and desired numbers of hours per week spent in various professional activities. The activities measured were assessments, interventions, meetings, report writing, research, systems-level programming, and professional development. Each item was arranged so respondents would first enter actual hours and then desired hours for each practice before moving to the next. Responses were allowed by the survey program to range from 0 to 40. Although not analyzed in the present study, respondents were also asked to report the percentage of time they actually and ideally spent in general education (non-special-education) activities, and the three levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary).



*Job Satisfaction.* The job satisfaction section utilized two measures. Career Satisfaction (Greenhaus, 1990) was a five-item, five-point Likert Scale question with an alpha coefficient ranging from .83 to .89. Responses ranged from „strongly agree“ to „strongly disagree“. The other job satisfaction measure, Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations (Bacharach, 1991), was a five-item, four-point Likert Scale question with an alpha coefficient of .88. Responses ranged from „very satisfied“ to „very dissatisfied“

### *Procedure*

Practicing school psychologists in the state of Minnesota received an electronic mail message (e-mail) requesting their participation in the „Survey of the Professional Practices of Minnesota School Psychologists“, which ran from March 1<sup>st</sup> to March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007. This e-mail included information explaining the survey, informed consent, contact information, and a link to the online survey (see Appendix A). If they agreed to complete the survey, they were directed to the online survey through a link. The school psychologist was then asked to fill out the survey with questions relating to professional practices and perceptions. When the participant was finished completing the survey they finished the process by submitting the survey. An additional e-mail was sent out following the first e-mail to remind individuals that may not have submitted a survey yet. This e-mail was the same as the previous e-mail except for a reminder message added to the top. The email distribution list used was maintained by the Minnesota School Psychologist Association (MSPA) and was used by their permission. The list contained not only members of MSPA but also all of school psychologists for whom the association had been able to find contact information. Rather than giving the email list to the

researchers, MSPA chose to send the recruitment email themselves with a link to the survey in the email.

## Results

### Practices

School psychologists in Minnesota reported spending a total of 52.7 hours per week in various professional activities. The results indicated participants were spending most of their time doing report writing, IQ testing, and other assessment activities. The practices data illustrated how current school psychology practices are centered on individual-level treatment and the areas related to systemic-level prevention are lacking (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

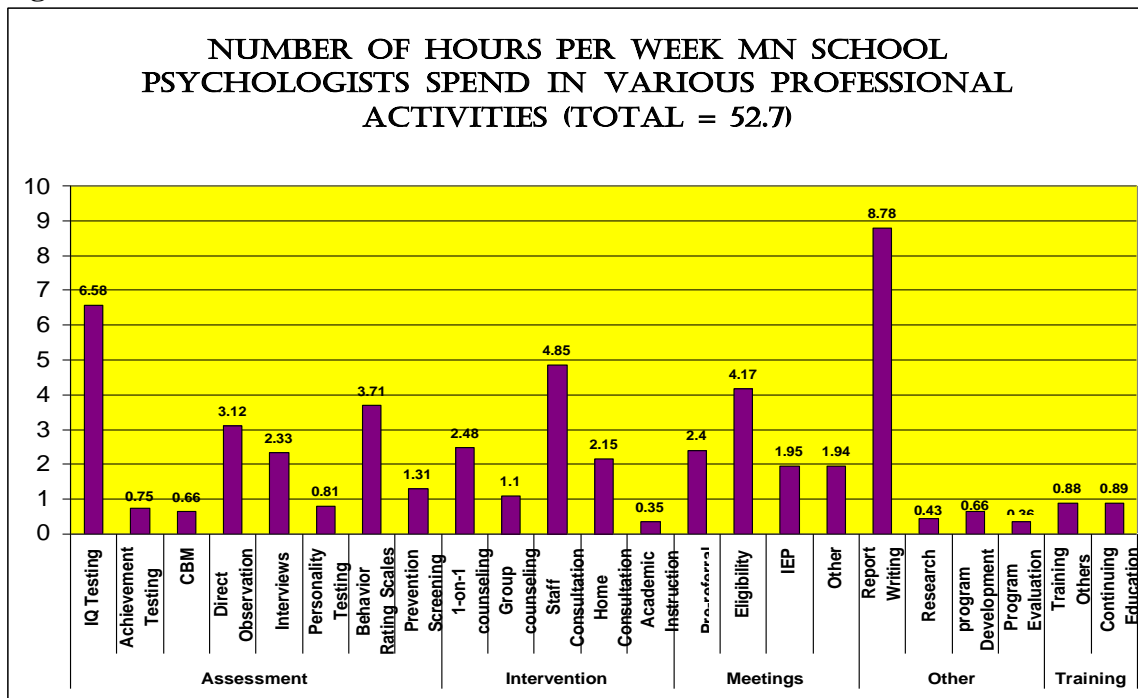
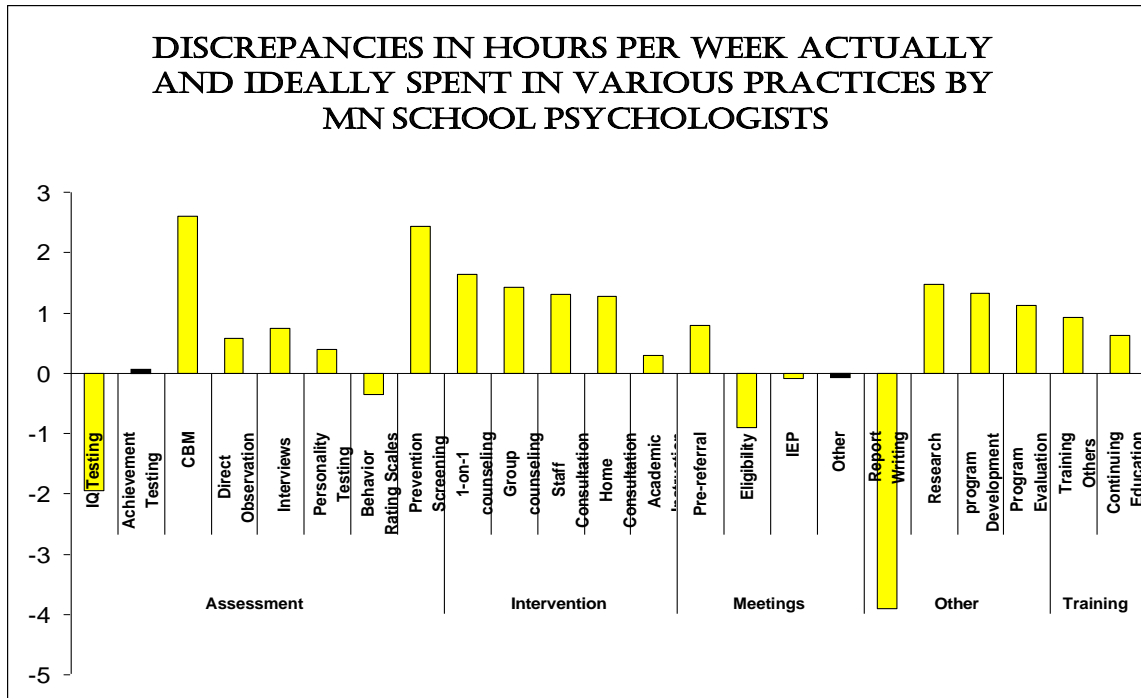


Figure 2 illustrates the discrepancies between actual and ideal practices of Minnesota school psychologists. The bars stretching below the zero mark line signify

practices that school psychologists would like to be spending less time in where as the bars stretching above indicate a desire to practice these activities more often. The five areas of practice that surveyed school psychologists experienced the most discrepancy were used as predictors of job satisfaction. These areas were found to be report writing, CBM (curriculum based measurement), prevention screening, IQ testing, and 1-on-1 counseling. Consistent with earlier research by Reschly and Wilson, the area of assessment was found to have the greatest discrepancy, with three of the five highest practice discrepancies under this category (1995).

**Figure 2**



*Job Satisfaction*

The mean and standard deviation of the Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations were  $M= 1.81$  and  $SD= .61$ . For the Career Satisfaction measure, the mean and standard deviation were  $M= 2.00$  and  $SD= .56$ . Regression Analyses were performed for both dependent variables, Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations and Career Satisfaction,

with each predictor, absolute practice discrepancies by practice category and the five highest practice discrepancies. They were analyzed to determine the degree to which our predictors explained job satisfaction.

#### *Practices as Predictors of Job Satisfaction*

Three of the four regression analyses were significant. Absolute practice discrepancies by practice category was a significant predictor of job satisfaction using the Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations scale,  $F= 6.55, p < .001, R^2 = .25$ . This data is summarized in Table 1. The five highest practice discrepancies was also a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations,  $F= 4.18, p < .01, R^2 = .15$ . This data is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1**

*Regression Analysis: Absolute practice discrepancies by practice category and Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations*

	B	Beta	t	p-value
Assessment	.07	.13	1.34	ns
Intervention	.06	.13	1.33	ns
Meetings	.15	.26	2.47	<.05
Report Writing	.04	.20	2.38	<.05
Program	.01	.03	.362	ns
Training	-.04	-.07	-.68	ns

**Table 2**

*Regression Analysis: Five highest practice discrepancies and Job Satisfaction Relative to Expectations*

	B	Beta	t	p-value
Report Writing	.05	.28	3.07	<.01

CBM	-.01	-.05	-.51	ns
Prev. Screening	.02	.09	.09	ns
IQ Testing	.04	.23	.23	<.05
1-on-1 Couns.	-.01	-.05	-.05	ns

The Career Satisfaction measure of job satisfaction did not obtain as significant results as the job satisfaction relative to expectations measure. Absolute discrepancies by practice category just met the cut-off for significance when regressed with the Career Satisfaction scale,  $F= 2.26$ ,  $p< .05$ ,  $R^2= .10$ . This data is summarized in Table 3. The only regression analysis that did not obtain significant results was between the five highest practice discrepancies as a predictor of the Career Satisfaction measure,  $F= 2.18$ ,  $p> .05$ ,  $R^2= .08$ . This data is summarized in Table 4.

**Table 3**

*Regression Analysis: Absolute practice discrepancies by practice category and Career Satisfaction*

	B	Beta	t	p-value
Assessment	.04	.08	.80	ns
Intervention	.03	.07	.62	ns
Meetings	.08	.15	1.30	ns
Report Writing	.01	.06	.62	ns
Program	.00	.01	.10	ns
Training	.04	.08	.78	ns

**Table 4**

*Regression Analysis: Five highest practice discrepancies and Career Satisfaction*

	B	Beta	t	p-value
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Report Writing	.02	.14	1.470	ns
CBM	.00	.00	.037	ns
Prev. Screening	.00	-.01	-.066	ns
IQ Testing	.02	.16	1.601	ns
1-on-1 Couns.	-.02	-.14	-1.584	ns

### Discussion

The results of this survey study show that a predictive relationship between practices and job satisfaction does exist. Therefore, this outcome supports the hypothesis that the discrepancy between actual and desired practices predicts job satisfaction. More specifically it was found that the absolute practice discrepancies by practice category explained 25% of job satisfaction using the job satisfaction relative to expectation measure. The five highest practice discrepancies explained 14.9% of job satisfaction using the same job satisfaction measure. And finally, absolute practice discrepancies by practice category also accounted for 10.3% of job satisfaction using the Career Satisfaction scale.

In light of the existing data on the discrepancies between actual and ideal practices and job satisfaction, similar patterns were found in this research. In particular assessment and report writing activities are characteristic of high levels of discrepancy. Additionally, high job satisfaction was found among school psychologists consistent with previous research (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). The data also confirmed a discrepancy in the actual and ideal practices, and a stable pattern between discrepancy in practices and job satisfaction. As a result, this data is beginning to fill in the void in the

literature concerning these two variables, the relationship between discrepancy in practices and job satisfaction.

The first limitation to be discussed is the inability to acquire an exact response rate. This is a drawback to the study because there is an unknown reason why people did not respond, the participants may have different response patterns than those who did not take the time to fill out the survey. Response rate also directly influences the results external validity, or the ability to be generalized. Tying into that, caution should be used due to the fact that only Minnesota practicing school psychologists participated in this study, therefore the opportunity to generalize these findings is very limited. Minnesota school psychologists have a history of carrying out more traditional practices than many other states, demonstrating that sweeping generalizations across the nation can not be made from this data. Surveying only Minnesota school psychologists also gave limited the number of participants. A larger sample size would assist in making the data more representative of the national population.

Considering these limitations, there are a few suggestions for future research. One possibility would be to distribute this survey on the national level. Increasing the sample size, variance, and allow the findings to be generalized nation wide. There would also be an opportunity to compare state-to-state data if this option were exercised. Additionally, results brought forth new questions to be researched including school psychologists willingness to work more hours if they practiced desired roles. Practicing Minnesota school psychologists reported spending 52.7 hours in actual practices while their desired or ideal practices totaled over 60 hours. Another interesting endeavor for future research would be to look at what influences the discrepancy between actual and

ideal practices. Barriers to desired practices such as time and funding are possibilities of precursors to discrepancies in practices, although as of now this is mere speculation.

In conclusion, significant findings were obtained answering the question of whether discrepancies in practices of school psychologists influence job satisfaction. The findings were consistent with previous literature and contributed to suggestions of future direction pertaining to these variables. Additional research and expansion of this survey to the national level is needed to confirm and bring into focus ideas concerning the relationship and influences surrounding the discrepancies in practices and job satisfaction of school psychologists.

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## Appendix A

Dear School Psychologist,

My name is Kevin Filter and I am a Nationally Certified School Psychologist working in the psychology department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am conducting a survey of practicing school psychologists in the state of Minnesota and would like you to participate if you actively practice at least part-time as a school psychologist and have a few minutes to help us. It is possible that this email has reached retired school psychologists, non-practicing school psychologists, or people involved primarily in training (trainers and students). If this is your situation, then thank you very much for your time and please disregard this request.

The survey will serve two purposes. First, your responses will help me to determine what issues are most important in pre-service training as I work with a number of agencies to develop a training program for school psychology. The second purpose of the study will be to empirically investigate relationships such as those between actual and desired practices and how discrepancies between the two affect job satisfaction. So, the data from this study should impact our field both by directly affecting the training of school psychologists and by adding to the research literature that drives our practices.

The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey includes five sections with questions regarding demographics, approximate hours spent in various professional activities, job satisfaction, perceived barriers to preferred practices, and attitudes toward and preparation for response-to-intervention models of practice. All responses will be completely anonymous and your name will not be associated with your responses. Therefore, there are no foreseeable significant risks to your physical, emotional, social, professional, or financial well-being if you choose to participate.

If you choose to participate, please follow the link at the end of this email, which will bring you directly to the survey. Submission of the completed survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate. You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose but we prefer you respond to all of them if you are comfortable doing so. Participation or non-participation will not impact your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Kevin Filter via email at [kevin.filter@mnsu.edu](mailto:kevin.filter@mnsu.edu) or via phone at (507) 389-5828. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Anne Blackhurst, chair of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-2321. Please also feel free to contact Dr. Kevin Filter if you would like to know more about the results of the survey. Please print a copy of this email for future reference.

To continue to the survey, please click here:

[LINK TO SURVEY](#)

Or copy and paste the following address into your browser:

<http://www.keysurvey.com/survey/122245/152c/>

### **Biography of Student Researcher**

Rebecca Fenicle is originally from Pipestone, Minnesota where she attended Pipestone Area Schools. While earning her high school diploma, Rebecca was a member of National Honor Society, a peer helper, and captain of the colorguard and gymnastics team. Rebecca is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in Psychology with a minor of Recreation, Parks and Leisure Services at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In addition to her academics, Rebecca is a member of Psi Chi National Honor Society for Psychology, Golden Key International Honor Society, has recently completed the Honor's Program in Psychology, and is involved with many volunteer activities. Also, she has participated on two research teams, the first under Dr. Kimberly O'Farrell concerning positive and negative feedback, and is currently conducting research with Dr. Kevin Filter concerning the practices and job satisfaction of school psychologists. Fenicle plans to continue her education following her baccalaureate and pursue a career related to school psychology.

### **Biography of Faculty Mentor**

Dr. Kevin J. Filter is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist who works as an assistant professor in the psychology department at Minnesota State Mankato. He received his Ph.D. in school psychology from the University of Oregon in 2004 and holds master's degrees in clinical psychology and special education. A native of Mankato, Dr. Filter was both an undergraduate and a graduate student at Minnesota State Mankato and completed his doctoral internship at River Bend Education District in New Ulm. He is involved with the Minnesota Department of Education's Statewide Positive Behavior Support Initiative as both a leadership team member and as a consultant and trainer. He has devoted himself recently to the development of an applied doctoral program in school psychology at Minnesota State Mankato. Dr. Filter recently received an Early Career Scholar Award from the Society for the Study of Professional Psychology and his research interests include applied behavior analysis, positive behavior support, sustainability of school-based innovations, and the barriers to best and preferred practices in school psychology.