

Departmental Assessment 2005-2006

The 2005-2006 assessment involved two separate projects. The first analysis was a two-year follow-up of the attitudes of WSU Psychology graduates regarding their experiences in the department and reflection on its curriculum. The second analysis was a study of the extent to which students overcome misconceptions about the discipline as a function of their interest in the discipline (those who were or were motivated to be psychology majors, minors, or neither) and the number of courses taken (one course or less vs. more than 1 course). Generally, the data strongly suggest that the goals of the department are being well supported in our graduating majors hold positive attitudes about their academic experiences in the department and our students are acquiring a deep understanding of the discipline.

Two-Year Follow-up on Graduates

The same questionnaire used to assess graduates' experiences in 2003-2004 was used again to assess students' experience in the department and with the curriculum (see Appendix 1). Since that time, three faculty members had resigned or retired. One new faculty member was hired in the interim but many of the departed faculty members' courses were handled by adjuncts. The purpose of the analysis then was to examine whether the faculty changes had negative consequences on students' experiences in the department and their evaluation of the curriculum. The sample consisted of the original 51 2003-2004 graduates of the psychology department and an additional 64 2005-2006 graduates. The two groups were no different in age ($M=26$ years), gender (70% female), overall GPA ($M=3.36$) and Psych GPA ($M=3.52$). The 2003-2004 cohort was ethnically less diverse than the 2005-2006 cohort, with 5% of the former sample self-identifying as an ethnic minority whereas 20% of the latter sample identified as such.

Some questions were designed to assess students' experiences in the department, including their general satisfaction, graduate preparation, advisement, academic quality, opportunities to improve oral communication, writing, reading, technical skills, and conceptual understanding and interaction with the faculty. These judgments were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 reflecting a low or dissatisfied score and 5 a high or highly satisfied score, except for the faculty assessment, which involved students merely identifying those faculty members who had a significant impact on their education. The 2003-2004 cohort was generally satisfied with their experience in the department, averaging scores between 3 and 4 on the 5 point scale. Advising showed a significant ($p<.01$) increase from the 2003-2004 ($M=3.72$) to the 2005-2006 ($M=4.21$) cohort, suggesting a more positive advising experience. There was a tendency ($p<.09$) for students to cite more psychology faculty members as having a significant educational impact on them, from 3.42 faculty members in the 2003-2004 cohort to 3.93 faculty members in the 2005-2006 cohort.

Other questions were designed to assess students' evaluation of the curriculum. Specifically, students were asked to evaluate the value of each course they had taken. Most courses retained their relatively high evaluation from the 2003-2004 cohort. There was an increase in perceived value in three courses: Biopsychology (2003-2004 $M=4.00$ vs. 2005-2006

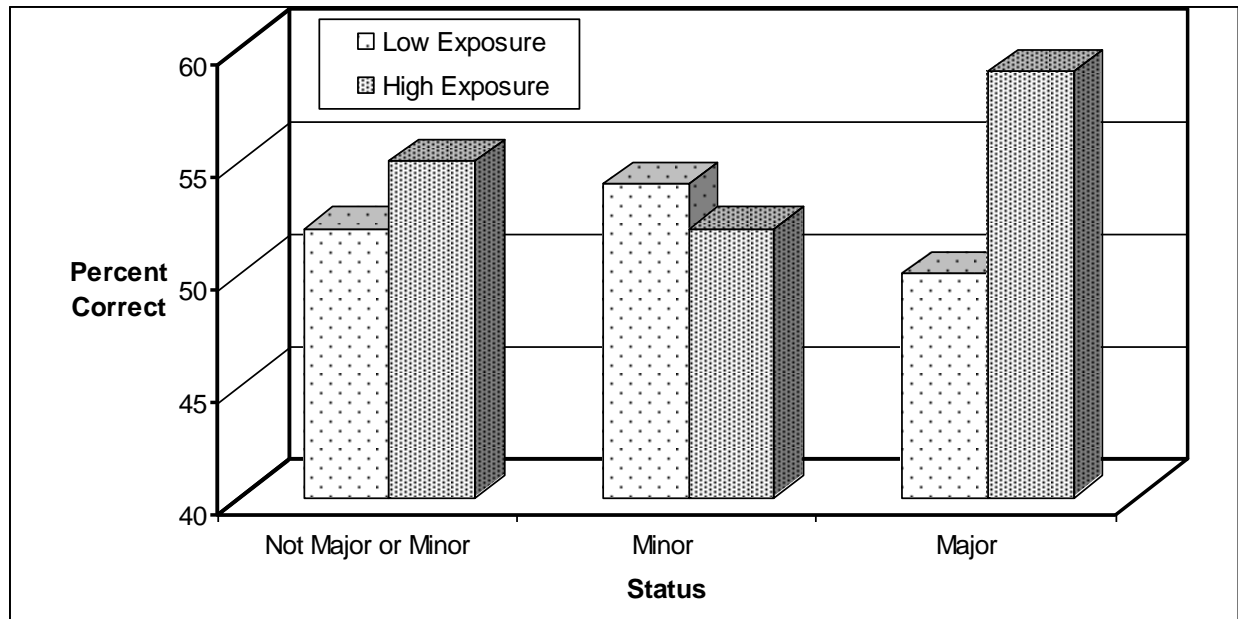
M=4.46), Child Psychology (2003-2004 M=4.09 vs. 2005-2006 M=4.44), and Social Psychology (2003-2004 M=3.93 vs. 2005-2006 M=4.38).

The present analysis of graduating students largely confirms the assessment performed two years earlier. There were areas where there was a positive change both in students' experiences in the department (advising and faculty contact) and evaluation of the curriculum (Biopsychology, Child Psychology, and Social Psychology). This increase occurred in the context of significant changes in the department and can largely be attributed to junior faculty members (Fowler, Shaw, Garza, and Kay) becoming even more involved with students and bringing new energy to those courses which showed greater value: Bio (Fowler), Social (Garza & Shaw), and Child (Kay & Shaw).

Overcoming Misconceptions in Psychology

A total of 215 students (34% Male and 66% Female) were participants, with 24% being freshmen, 20% sophomores, 18% juniors, and 38% seniors. Each participant completed an on-line version of Kowalski and Kujawski-Taylor's (2004) Misconceptions in Psychology Questionnaire, which assesses students' *general knowledge* about psychology (e.g., there are two hemispheres of the brain) and extent to which they hold popular *misconceptions* about the discipline (e.g., we use 10% of our brain). It is a 60-item true/false test with 43 items devoted to misconceptions and 17 to general knowledge. This questionnaire taps a wide range of knowledge about the discipline and as a measure of its validity, correct performance on the test predicts students' anticipated grade in their psychology course ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$) independently of their sex, age, status, number of psychology courses, and group (major, minor, or neither) status.

Students were categorized into one of 6 groups reflecting their Interest in the Discipline (those who were or planning to be psychology Majors, Minors, or Neither) and their Exposure to the Discipline (one or less vs. more than one psychology course). An analysis showed that Majors showed the largest increase in correct answers on the test as a function of exposure (see Table 1).



These results suggest that regardless of their motivation, students enter into psychology courses with a good deal of misconceptions about the discipline. Specifically students with low experience (taking their first or second course in the discipline) had overall scores hovering at chance (50%). Only would-be or actual majors showed a significant increase in their performance on the test with greater exposure to the discipline. Indeed, the average test score of these students is well above chance, suggesting that they are slowly but surely learning to think like psychologists and purging themselves of incorrect assumptions or beliefs about the discipline.

Together the results of the assessments suggest that the department has weathered a transition period with little negative impact on students because of the commitment of faculty members to offering a quality education in the discipline.

(Revised August 2004)

Weber State University Psychology Graduation Evaluation

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Year Graduated:
5. Cumulative University GPA:
6. Psychology GPA:
7. What was your primary area of interest in Psychology?
___ *Biological* ___ *Cognitive/Behavioral* ___ *Abnormal/Therapeutic* ___ *Social/Developmental*
8. Outside of your coursework, do you enjoy reading and/or learning about psychology?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely No		Undecided		Definitely Yes
9. Explain in brief detail why you decided to major in Psychology at Weber State University.
10. After choosing to major in psychology, what goals did you hope to accomplish through your studies? (Please select only one - the most important to you.)
___ Generalist education
___ Preparation for Graduate School
___ Preparation for Professional School
___ Preparation for Employment
___ Preparation for Life Skills
___ Personal Recovery
___ Other (Specify)
11. What are your plans/goals after receiving your Bachelor's Degree? (Check all that apply.)
___ Employment
___ Graduate School in Psychology
___ Other Graduate or Professional School
___ Military Service
___ Volunteer Service
___ Homemaker
___ Other (Specify)
12. Did you apply to graduate school? Yes ___ No ___
13. Have you been accepted? Yes ___ No ___

14. Imagine that you are just beginning your college education. Knowing what you know now, would you choose Psychology as your major?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely No		Undecided		Definitely Yes

15. How satisfied are you with your education in Psychology at Weber State University?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Dissatisfied		Satisfied		Completely Satisfied

16. How satisfied are you with your general education at Weber State University?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Dissatisfied		Satisfied		Completely Satisfied

17. If you were to or are planning to continue your education in a graduate program in Psychology, to what extent do you believe that your education in the Psychology department at Weber State prepared you for graduate school?

1	2	3	4	5
Not At All Prepared		Undecided		Well Prepared

18. How satisfied are you with the advisement you received from your faculty advisor in the Psychology Department?

1	2	3	4	5
Complete Dissatisfied		Satisfied		Completely Satisfied

19. How would you rate the overall academic standards of the Psychology department?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor		Average		Excellent

How well did your experiences in the Psychology department help you develop your :

20. Oral Communication Skills?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

21. Written Communication Skills?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

22. Reading Comprehension Skills?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

23. Conceptual Skills (your ability to think through problems and develop your own ideas and perspectives on psychological issues)?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

24. Technical/Psychological Skills (e.g., computer skills, data collection, management, and analysis)?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

25. Interpersonal Skills?

1	2	3	4	5	NA
Not at all		Somewhat		A lot	Not Applicable

26. Briefly describe your best educational experiences in the Psychology Department.

27. From this list, please check *any* of the Psychology professors you found to be particularly helpful to your experiences at Weber State University.

___ Dr. Eric Amsel	___ Dr. Norris Bancroft	___ Dr. Azanett Garza	___ Dr. Theresa Kay	___ Dr. Leigh Shaw
___ Dr. Julianne Arbuckle	___ Dr. Paul Caldarella	___ Dr. Richard Grow	___ Dr. William McVaugh	
___ Dr. Rick Atkinson	___ Dr. Lauren Fowler	___ Dr. Joseph Horvat	___ Prof. Maria Parilla de Kokal	

28. On the next page, please evaluate each course you took in the Psychology Department.