

Department of Psychology Program Review: Executive Summary

The mission of the Psychology department is “to facilitate students’ career aspirations and academic goals by excellence in training in the science of psychology in the context of an undergraduate, Liberal Arts university”. There are two central goals that follow from the mission which have been embraced by the department and embodied in the curriculum. The first goal is to promote students’ knowledge of the content of the discipline, including relevant theories and research. The second goal is to promote students’ skills to think in a disciplinary manner, which includes the scientific attitudes and skills to analyze and understand human behavior like a psychologist.

Curriculum

The Psychology curriculum is structured with students’ career and academic goals in mind, with courses offered reflecting a depth and breadth of coverage of the discipline. The curriculum includes a total of 41 unique courses distributed over 6 areas, including Basic Requirements (Area 1); Biological Basis of Behavior (Area 2); Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Basis of Behavior (Area 3); Abnormal and Therapeutic Basis of Behavior (Area 4); Social & Developmental Basis of Behavior (Area 5); and Support Courses (Area 6). Majors are required to complete 36 credit hours for a bachelors degree, with 3 required courses (10 credit hours taken from Area 1), a breadth requirement of 6 courses (18 credit hours, taken from Areas 2-5), and the remaining 8 credit hours taken from any area.

Besides the major, the department offers a number of degree paths to students including a Bachelor’s of Integrated Studies (BIS) emphasis, a minor, a teaching major and minor. In addition, students may pursue an Honors degree with a major or minor in Psychology at either the Department level or the University level.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Student learning outcomes were defined in terms of the goals derived from the mission statement: Promoting discipline-appropriate thinking and content knowledge. With regard to promoting students’ disciplinary thinking, learning outcomes included to *Think Like a Psychologist* (i.e., grasping the theoretical, statistical, and methodological issues in the discipline), *Act in Accordance with the APA Ethical Guidelines*, and *Communicate Professional Information Effectively*. Learning outcomes for the goal of promoting disciplinary content knowledge were defined in terms of students’ appreciation of the four required breadth content areas: *Biological, Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral, Abnormal & Therapeutic*, and *Social and Developmental* basis of behavior.

Learning outcomes were assessed using a variety of means, including *Qualitative Interviews* (used to assess Psychology students’ disciplinary knowledge and skills), *Standardized Tests* (used to assess students’ ethical, methodological and statistical knowledge), *Graduating Student Survey* (used to assess the experience of graduating seniors), *Alumni Survey* (used to assess the undergraduate experiences and post-graduate career trajectories of Alumni), and

Faculty Survey (used to assess faculty members' strategies and techniques for promoting pedagogical goals).

The results of the assessments clearly indicated that the learning outcomes associated with each goal were being fulfilled. Psychology students were uniquely learning to think like psychologists (compared to students in other departments and colleges), with direct correlations between their grasp of general statistical and methodological concepts and the number of psychology courses students completed. Psychology students and alumni also valued courses in each of the breadth areas, reflecting at least an appreciation of their exposure to the class material, if not a measure of their learning of that material.

Academic Advising

The department's policy is to perform major advising in the manner that pre-major advising is performed in the university, that is, as a recommended but not required activity. Nonetheless, there are five procedures in place to ensure that students have all the academic and career advising information they need. First, upon completing their registration as a major, students are assigned an advisor, provided with their advisor's contact information, and strongly encouraged to immediately contact their advisor. Second, a newsletter is available each fall to students which details information relevant for academic and career advising. The information in the newsletter is also available on the Department of Psychology web site. Third, majors and students interested in majoring in Psychology are invited to a regularly scheduled group advisement session run by the College Advisor (Jennifer Allison) and Psychology Department faculty. Fourth, the Psychology Department hosts a social session (with pizza and soft drinks) each semester, during which the faculty members are introduced and questions about academic and career issues are addressed. Fifth, each fall and spring semester, faculty members lecture on procedures for getting into graduate school. In one survey of recently declared majors, most of them had contacted their advisor. Moreover, surveys responses of graduating seniors suggest that they are at least satisfied with their major advising experience.

Faculty

The department faculty members are award-winning teachers (33% of the faculty have won college or university awards for teaching) who are productive (they shoulder more of the teaching production than expected by their numbers), engaged (many students are supervised in practicum or research), and effective (students' faculty-supported research has been presented and published). These accomplishments were achieved despite major changes in faculty members over the past several years. Only three faculty members remain in the department since the last review, 10 years ago. All faculty members embrace two central pedagogical values in their teaching activities: Treating the discipline as scientific and promoting student success. However, there is expected diversity in how these values are instantiated by each faculty member. Faculty development opportunities in the department include regularly scheduled thematic discussions about such topics as Intro Psychology and Ethics. All faculty members (Adjunct and Full-time) are evaluated annually and biennially, with junior faculty being reviewed formally for rank and tenure in their 3rd and 6th years. Despite changes in full-time faculty, their FTEs have remained constant over the past 5 years. Indeed, the average faculty

FTEs for the department is constantly higher than the number of faculty! The reason for this is two fold. First, is the growth of on-line classes which faculty members teach as overload. Second is the policy that faculty can “bank” on-campus overload courses for later in-load reductions (used most frequently for faculty preparing for maternity leave)

In contrast to full-time FTEs, adjunct faculty FTEs has shown a notable increase. The increase in adjunct FTEs was attributed in part to budget cuts and sabbaticals which required adjuncts to fill curricular needs, particularly in the last three years, and to the expansion of psychology course offerings at satellite campuses. Although most of the department’s adjunct faculty members are emeritus faculty, counseling center staff, or persons with a long history with the department, a handful of new adjunct faculty members have been hired over the past five years. They are selected for their understanding of the department and experience teaching targeted courses. They are regularly evaluated, carefully supervised, and invited to join in departmental and university-wide faculty developmental opportunities.

Program Support

The support staff of one secretary and one work-study student is similar to the support staff hired in other departments in the college. The secretary is formally evaluated regularly using a formal evaluation system (PREP) that assesses a number of performance areas and establishes goals for future development.

The department is also supported by a host of facilities, equipment, and university-based resources. The institutional support includes the campus learning/testing centers, WebCT and WSU online facilities. The department has three multimedia-equipped classrooms and three portable multimedia units for classroom use. The department also has a physiological laboratory, a computer laboratory, four small psychological testing cubicles with psychological testing equipment and materials, and a series of rooms used for developmental, cognitive and social psychology research. Each faculty member has a personal computer linked to the internet. The library’s book collections, media collections and journals are used regularly by faculty. What may be unavailable in the library is typically available through superb interlibrary loan facilities. The department budget is based on the Dean’s well-developed formula which has been effective in providing some discretionary funds for each full-time faculty member.

Relationships with the External Community

Over the past five years, psychology faculty members have been involved in various community activities (engaging in activities outside the confines of the university) and community relations (bringing community members to the campus). Community activities of the faculty include being formally involved as psychologists offering consulting to federal agencies (Social Security, Vocational Rehabilitation), state agencies (Mental Health, Disabilities, Education, etc.), serving on the board of directors of community agencies (Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnerships, Weber Human Services, Boys and Girls Club, Foster Grandparents, Treehouse Children’s Museum) or otherwise volunteering their expertise in reviewing IRB protocols at the local hospital, offering diversity trainings to businesses, collaborating with Air Force research, training the staff at Youth Impact, and helping to organize

and present lectures in the Governor's Family Initiative. They have completed a number of different community research projects, supervised civic engagement projects, given lectures and served as a media resource. Faculty members have also encouraged community members (including alumni) to give lectures in their classes or to the entire department.

The review team includes Dr. Richard Miller, Ph.D. (Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska Kearney), Dr. Les Jones, Ed.D (Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Southern Utah University), Dr. James Bird, Ph.D. (Professor of Child and Family Studies, Weber State University), and Dr. Michelle Heward, JD, (Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Weber State University).