

Weber State University

Department of Psychology

External Review Visit: March 4-5, 2012

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External Review Report: March 25, 2012

A. Mission Statement

The Mission Statement is clear and has been refined since the 2006 review as evidenced by having four rather than two goals—knowledge, application, values/ethics, and interpersonal relations and communication. Moreover, these goals were designed to be in line with state-of-the-art guidelines for undergraduate curriculum published by the American Psychological Association. The mission statement and the goals are clear, and they resonate with the national standards as well as the standards of the university. The department should be commended on their mission statement, goals, and empirical evidence. Currently the College of Social Science lacks a mission statement, which makes it difficult for departments to integrate within the overall mission of the College. We recommend revisiting the four program goals once the goals of College of Social & Behavioral Sciences have been formulated. As for now, the mission and goals are thoughtfully streamlined and cover achievable student outcomes. The clear outlining of the four goals also facilitates assessment of student learning outcomes in the department.

B. Curriculum

The current self-study reports a major overhaul of the curriculum, which is to be commended. It is extremely important to maintain the currency of courses and serve students with different career goals. We find the curriculum to correspond well with the mission and goals of the department and to offer students a variety of core and elective courses. It is evident that the department maintains a process of curriculum review and encourages a number of high impact learning opportunities for students. The department consistently examines and revises its curriculum. The curriculum has emerged as a rigorous and structured program. In order to assess the curriculum, procedures have been put in place to empirically evaluate how courses meet program goals. These evaluations provide guidance for program changes. The system has been labeled the *curriculum map* and it is designed to review courses in terms of each goal; Knowledge, Application, Ethics/Values, and Relations and Community. We believe that the evidence supports the

conclusion that all goals are being addressed in the curriculum, although it is believed that the Ethics section needs some enhancement.

The 2006 Regents Review recommended that the department develop a formal method to provide a capstone experience to all of its majors. The department should be commended on their attempts to implement this recommendation. Because of the complexity of the curriculum and high numbers of majors, there is no single capstone course. Instead, the current curriculum provides several opportunities for synthesis and reflection that can be achieved without formally adding a capstone course; for example, through practicum and other high impact courses. We do not see an urgency to move forward with the Capstone course idea. The menu option is an excellent opportunity for students to seek capstone experiences that fit with the long-term professional goals. On a more practical level, a new course may be difficult to accommodate given that there are still two faculty lines to be filled in the department.

The faculty members are to be lauded for their work with students on independent research projects and practicum. The students receive extraordinary opportunities to work with faculty both in and out of the classroom. We encourage the faculty to broadcast more openly these opportunities that are available to students. The proactive students will seek out and find the opportunities, but those students who are less proactive may need some enhanced encouragement to participate in these vital and important outside-of-class opportunities

C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Learning outcomes are in line with the program goals. We were impressed with the number and quality of the assessment documents at the departmental Web site for faculty to engage in continuous assessment of learning outcomes. The EOL measures are clearly defined and connected with at least one –and often more—direct measures. We did not, however, find clear information about the specific ways in which the assessment drives program changes. Although students upon graduation are satisfied with their major, the suggestion that students’ satisfaction is influenced by their experiences with challenging courses could be further probed. Removing “easier classes” from the curriculum is perhaps the right direction to take, but what exactly constitutes “easy” is not explained. What is evident, however, is that should students wish to be challenged, and the curriculum offers opportunities for them to do so.

In addition to evaluating courses, the department also uses goals to measure *student-learning outcomes*. The department has monitored student learning as the student advances from first to senior year. Through these measures, graduating seniors report they are receiving "rigorous training in their psychology major." The program reviewers’ discussion with senior students supports the findings of a rigorous program, with supportive faculty and staff, and opportunities for student mentoring. The main challenge in this standard is commitment of time and energy in measuring the goals, conducting research with students, and providing practicum supervision in order to provide such a comprehensive education. Hopefully, whoever is coordinating these efforts is receiving appropriate compensation.

D. Academic Advisement

The department has taken measures to improve their advisement since the last review. It is now more proactive, and the program has a clear strategy for advising students. They have provided some release time to a faculty member for advisement, and made it a requirement for each major or minor to meet for a minimum of 15 minutes with the Department Advisor. Students have access to a departmental advisor who helps them plan their program of study in addition to assisting in using the CatTracks software. Faculty seemed very familiar with CatTracks, the university web based system that supports real-time delivery of academic advice through intuitive web interfaces. This allows individual faculty the ability to provide up-to-date advisement on an individual basis. Furthermore, the department has a student Advisement Handbook that appears to be very complete. It is obvious that those students who need and seek advisement will receive it and are satisfied with it. We commend the department for developing the Advisement Handbook, which answers many basic questions for students who might otherwise be hesitant to ask a professor. In the discussion with students the utility of the Handbook was underscored. Also, another informal advising function is performed by Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology. There might be a variety of opportunities to coordinate the efforts of the advisor and the student organization for greater effectiveness, especially for students who are not planning to apply to graduate school.

E. Faculty

Full-Time Faculty

The program's *regular faculty* is recognized for teaching excellence and honors. Half of the faculty has received some of the university's highest faculty awards. They are extremely active in local, state, and national organizations. Faculty are involved with students in many capacities outside of the classroom, as advisors in practicum and research projects, while teaching a full load of 12 hours (plus overload). Overall, this is a very busy group with many responsibilities. Recent designation of an advisor (with a course reduction) and a course-release compensation for directed readings and research projects has made an unbearable workload a bit more manageable. Further efforts to support faculty are warranted.

In meeting with the full-time faculty, it became evident that the tenure process for more clinically-oriented faculty has been a point of contention in the past. The key question for the clinical psychology faculty remains the integration of clinical work into the college tenure document. To solve this problem, we recommend that the department draft a short guide for the college tenure committee to educate them about clinical psychology, its role in the Psychology curriculum, and the typical products of clinical work (as opposed to academic work).

In the previous review, two concerns were expressed. One concern was that faculty who were actively participating in student research and experiential learning were not receiving reasonable compensation in teaching load. The other was that the College of Social Science's tenure and promotion document did not provide credit relative to the

college's priority of undergraduate research and experiential teaching. In terms of the first concern, the department has attempted to provide faculty who engage in individualized student instruction with some reduction in course load, as provided by the University's Policy and Procedure document. However, based on their data, course reduction is still only provided about 13% of the time. The second concern regarding the tenure and promotion document has not been addressed. This appears to stem from the College because they have not reviewed their document in over a decade. It is strongly recommended that the tenure and promotion document reflect the University, College, and Department's current emphasis on undergraduate research and experiential/community service. We, however, understand that the College is currently reviewing and revising its tenure and promotion policy and hope that the revision will incorporate these forms of important scholarly and service tasks.

It is noted that the program is short of two faculty lines and therefore does not function at full capacity. Hopefully, this can be resolved quickly because of the tremendous amount of work that the current faculty is undertaking.

The faculty report that the current chair (Eric Amsel) is doing a terrific job in leading the department; in fact, he has been universally praised by all parties that we interacted with during our program review visit.

Adjunct Faculty

The *adjunct faculty* are unusually long-term members of the department and are reviewed annually by the chair. In general, adjuncts are satisfied with their integration into and involvement with the department. Surprisingly many of them expressed desire to be further involved, for example in faculty research and or as resources in the community and state. Some adjunct faculty would like the opportunity for more frequent contacts with the regular faculty, and some reported an interest in working with students and/or other faculty on research projects. Adjuncts feel like they are an untapped resource for both faculty members and students as they can provide “windows to the real world.” Our discussions also revealed their desire to be more than a nominal part of the program’s EOL assessment efforts.

The Department is commended on their procedures to train and integrate adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty reported rigorous pedagogical training, including observations from the department chair with oral feedback and recommendations as well as continuous availability for consultation on teaching and training concerns. The evaluation process for adjuncts is rigorous. There is a committee that assesses an adjunct's credentials, reviews an adjunct's teaching performance and course evaluations, and provides mentorship. The Department even has a procedure for remediation or *no rehire* in cases where adjunct faculty are not adequately performing. In a meeting with selected group of adjuncts, they expressed a great appreciation for how quickly the department responded to their concerns, and invitations to meeting and luncheons.

F. Program Support

A major concern in regards to program support is the adequacy of the staff. The department is fortunate to have a secretary who is exemplary. However, she is overloaded

and performs activities outside her job description. It became very clear that the secretary is satisfied with her work and finds opportunities for development. It appears that the job description of the well-qualified and hard-working departmental secretary is at least 20 years out of date; we strongly recommend that the process be initiated in conjunction with campus practices and Human Resources to edit and update the secretarial job description, and adjust titles and/or salaries as appropriate after the review process is complete. If this cannot occur, then the department should hire additional staff to help meet the demands. Presently, the Department has attempted to assist the secretarial workload by using work-study students, but work-study students are temporary and can be drawn from a narrow pool of applicants limited to those who meet economic guidelines. Additionally, they can only provide limited support to the many specialized tasks (e.g., web programming for research pool) that the secretary performs.

The chair evaluates the secretary on a regular basis and she has open access to the chair, should problems arise. This is a commended practice, and could facilitate the process of updating the secretary's job description

Departmental funding has not changed over 5 years. This puts a great stress on the ability to advance educational programs. The 2006 review recommended that the psychology department search for funds outside the university in order to help support their research efforts and facility enhancements. We support the previous recommendation that the department be able to keep part of the 10% administrative costs that are typically charged to grants and contracts. This would encourage, and reward, faculty to obtain private donations.

The availability of research space in the social science building and the allocation of that space is a concern of the department chair and the faculty. Given that the building is about to be renovated, this is an area of pressing concern. It seems odd that there are empty spaces in the current building that are controlled by the Dean; given that space is such a precious commodity, we encourage the Dean to consider yielding that space to the Department of Psychology once they have formulated a strategic plan and demonstrated to the Dean how this unused space is vital to allowing the department to meet its strategic and tactical goals.

G. Relationships with External Communities

The Department's community relationships seem exemplary. This was evidenced during a meeting with community organizations that utilize practicum students. The community partners appeared extremely satisfied with the quality and nature of the relationship with Psychology students. They were also very keen on continuing, and even expanding, the partnerships. The community partners are well coordinated with the curriculum and the roles of the faculty, students and partner roles are clearly defined. One community member representing an alternative high school attributed the growing number of graduates from that school that are now attending Weber State University to the commitment that the psychology practicum students have provided. Another community representative displayed a brochure that a psychology student had prepared for the program that they use to give parents.

Alumni report very positive experiences. They reported that their education provided them with the necessary skills to pursue their career goals.

We recommend that the Department consider developing an External Advisory Committee. They currently do not have one, nor do they provide a reason. A community advisory board can provide important insight to the Department's strategic objectives, and, possibly, assist them in locating outside funding and resources.

H. Program Summary

The Dean sees the Department of Psychology as a model department with well-qualified faculty, remarkably cohesive, and industrious, having just completed a thorough overhaul of the curriculum of a very popular major. The department serves an important purpose in the general education curriculum as well as contributing to interdisciplinary minors.

The Department produced an extensive self-study that provides evidence of a highly focused program and committed faculty that produce a high number of qualified undergraduate students. The Department Chair, Dr. Eric Amsel, has been a strong advocate for the Department, and is held in high esteem by the community, students, faculty, and University. Through his leadership, and a strong commitment by a highly qualified and effective faculty, the psychology program has made significant improvements and is on a very positive trajectory. A recommendation is for them to develop at least a 5-year strategic plan that reflects their mission and can guide their energy. However, in order for them to do this, the College of Social Science should first consider developing a College Mission Statement and a College strategic plan.

The self-study report provides evidence of implementation of well-focused changes based on the previous review team's recommendations. The program has benefitted from a curriculum revision, the designation of a faculty advisor, securing additional space for research, and improving compensation for faculty who take on extra assignments that enrich students' learning. We recommend that the department work toward creating a better defined capstone experience (not necessarily a course) to allow students to synthesize what they have learned, and we recommend more PR work at the college level to make sure the tenure requirements for clinical psychology are well understood and documented to avoid future problems. The role of diversity in the curriculum also needs stronger focus in the future. According to faculty, they teach issues of diversity, but the curriculum and class designations show very little evidence of it.

The Department of Psychology needs to participate in a strategic planning process; this would be more effective if these efforts were coordinated with college- and university-wide strategic planning initiatives. We strongly recommended that the College allow the Department of Psychology faculty to be entrepreneurial. This could include permitting them to manage issues such as online offerings and in-load expectations; as long as the department continues to meet student credit hour needs. Additionally, department faculty should be encouraged to explore innovative ways to meet needs. Again, this could be facilitated by allowing faculty and/or the department receive part of the 10% overhead charged in grants. It seems that the future trajectory is unlimited; we recommend that the faculty advantage themselves of this new day and think boldly and embrace an entrepreneurial attitude to experiment with new avenues of achieving departmental and college-wide goals.