

Dean's Response

Program Review of the Department of Psychology, Weber State University

April 27, 2017

I appreciate the work of the review team (Drs. Kenneth Keith and Christopher Hoagstrom) in producing the program review, and of the Department of Psychology in writing the self-study and department response.

The review team's report is overall a strongly positive assessment of the work of the Psychology Department, an assessment that I strongly endorse. In my comments, I will follow the section headings used by the review team and the department response.

Mission statement

The review team finds that the department's mission statement is student-centered, clearly related to the curriculum, and consonant with the guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

Curriculum and assessment

The review team report concludes that the curriculum is a solid, up-to-date, mainstream one, which is clearly informed by assessment of student learning. It praises the faculty for their willingness "to make labor-intensive curriculum changes" when assessment data point in that direction (e.g., the new integrated statistics-research methods course).

The report suggests that more attention be paid in the curriculum to cultural variation in behavior, and the department response indicates that the Psychology faculty will do so. The report also suggests that, instead of assessing learning in every course every semester, the department use a sampling approach, assuring that all courses are assessed in a 3-to-4-year cycle. The department responds that the suggested cycle was their former assessment plan. Some popular courses, they note, are irregularly offered, and might thus be only infrequently assessed; they feel it is better to assess all courses. Considering the workload caused by assessing all courses, perhaps the department could consider a sampling approach at least to their core courses which are offered frequently, since they note that the approach suggested by the review team "works well" for these standard core courses.

Advising

The review team finds that the department's single-faculty advisor plan works very well, allowing for a consistent advising approach and message to all advised students. They also

praise the student handbook developed by the faculty advisor. They suggest improved integration between the handbook and graduation maps; the department agrees to undertake this effort.

Noting that advising is not mandatory each semester, the review team urges consideration of a mandatory advising requirement for students each semester. While encouraging students to seek advisement, the department notes that they do not have the human resources to support such an advising scheme (indeed, neither do the College or the University).

Faculty

The report finds that the department has a “strong, productive faculty with shared, collective values and aims.” It praises their success in supplying meaningful research experience, and other “high-impact” opportunities to their students, despite their high numbers of majors. I concur completely with this assessment.

Program support

The review team expresses some concern about demands on faculty time due to the 4-4 teaching load, potential faculty burnout, and limited support for research and travel. The department response notes the help provided by teaching assistants and supplemental instructors. Little can be done about the teaching load, prescribed by the Board of Regents; the College has a modest capacity to address the time stress issue by making some adjunct funding available to allow faculty to take better advantage of banked course-release time. Regarding travel funding, the College has increased by \$200 in recent years the funding annually available per faculty member. Faculty can apply to the Dean’s Office for additional travel support in case of foreign or multiple trips. The College also encourages faculty to seek external grant funding – which can provide faculty and student support, equipment, and buyout of time from the standard teaching load – with a stipend paid to faculty for grant submissions through the Office of Sponsored Projects, and negotiation for course release during the term of grants. Additionally, there are internal University funds available to support research and faculty and student travel – which the department has had good success in obtaining over the years.

Regarding facilities, as the review team notes, the upcoming building renovation will result in major improvement in the department’s teaching and research facilities, most notably the animal and neuroscience lab spaces.

I agree with the review team that the Department of Psychology is a productive one, with a well-conceived curriculum and a dedicated, cohesive faculty who do undergraduate teaching “distinctively well.” They see no need for major changes in department practices; the several changes they do suggest are embraced in the department response. I will do what I can to support the department’s continuing excellent performance.