

## **Educational Program Institutional Effectiveness Report**

**Degree Program:** Bachelor of Arts Psychology

**College/School:** College of Arts and Sciences      **Department:** Psychology

**Submission Date:** January 25, 2010

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically about and to analyze psychology concepts and literature.
2. Students will be able to effectively communicate psychological concepts and research in the style of the American Psychological Association.
3. Students will be able to present and interpret quantitative data in psychological research.

### **Assessment Methods**

All Psychology majors are required to complete a capstone laboratory course that is generally taken during the Senior year (either 410, 412, or 417). General Psychology, Psychological Statistics, and Experimental Psychology are all prerequisites for the capstone courses, so all students are well advanced in their academic program by the time they enroll. Students in each capstone course write one or more papers and may give talks or present posters. These activities require students to integrate many of the skills developed during the student's prior coursework in psychology with those specific to the particular course and thus provide ideal products for assessment departmental learning outcomes. Course instructors in each capstone course rate these products with respect to expected levels of performance regarding the departmental goals.

Items 1, 2 & 6 of the instrument are used to assess SLO 1.

Items 3 & 4 of the instrument are used to assess SLO 2.

Items 5 & 6 of the instrument are used to assess SLO 3.

### **Summary of Assessment Results**

Assessment results have been collected for three years. Spring 2007 results were overall quite strong in all areas except use of APA style (part of SLO 2). While few concerns were raised by the full department, the Undergraduate Steering Committee continued to study these data and became concerned by the variability in student performance that may have been due to differing objectives and practices used by different instructors in the required core sequence of the major curriculum.

Spring 2008 assessment results were much lower than those of Spring 2007. There was a discussion about level of expectations, consistency among the raters, and continuity of raters from 2007 to 2008. With the addition of the Spring 2009 results, a pattern began to immerge regarding students' ability to present and interpret quantitative data. In 2008 and 2009 only 65% and 60%, respectively, of students scored above expectations on appropriate graphical or

statistical analysis of data. For interpretation of data, the percentages were 72% and 66%. Discussion of outcome data led to some concerns about retention and application of statistical skills and the quantitative and scientific core of psychology. Many faculty members noted that students are not exposed to the quantitative and natural science side of psychology until quite late in their major program and are ill prepared for the methods sequence as a result.

### **Implemented Improvements Based on Assessment Results**

In order to address the variability of assessment results for Spring 2007, the chair formed committees composed of key instructors of the required courses and charged each with developing a consensus set of goals and objectives for each requirement. Consensus goals and objectives for each required course were developed by key instructors and approved by the department on January 7, 2008 (see: Category 2 Course Goals, Consensus Guidelines for PSY 105 Instruction, Course Objectives PSY 225, and Course Goals PSY 355 attached).

To address assessment results for SLO 3, the Undergraduate Steering committee was charged with studying the sequence of courses in the department, the role of quantitative, natural science oriented courses in the major, the possibility of requiring majors to take STT 215 to improve statistics skills or alter the focus or sequence of PSY 225 and 355 to enhance application of quantitative methods. In order to address this and other curricular issues (in particular the categories recommended for majors in a 2009 report on undergraduate education from the American Psychological Association), the committee proposed a thorough restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum with six 200-level courses to be required of all majors. These will include 200-level courses in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, learning and behavior analysis, psychopathology, personality and social psychology. These courses will introduce students to scientific principles and quantitative reasoning early in their major career and will serve as pre-requisites to currently existing courses which will now be taught at a more advanced level. These changes were approved in principle by the department on January 7, 2010. Curricular subcommittees were formed and are currently developing course descriptions and objectives for final departmental approval and submission to the college curriculum review committee by the end of this academic year. Research methods course requirements are still under review at this writing.

### **Documentation of Implemented Improvements (attached)**

Category 2 Course Goals  
Consensus Guidelines for PSY 105 Instruction  
Course Objectives PSY 225  
Course Goals PSY 355  
Excerpts from Faculty Meeting January 7, 2010