

Psychology Departmental Assessment Report
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Summary of past decisions

- In the time since the last HLC visit (08-09), what changes have been made in your department (new courses, changes to existing courses, restructuring major, etc)?

We have hired Drs. Lindsay Kennedy, Ruthann Thomas, and Sara Taylor, thereby increasing the number and variety of classes we offer students in our department, in the areas of our required research sequence (Research Methods & Statistics), Cluster A (biological psychology), and Cluster B (personality and social psychology) and in the Neuroscience program and Health Sciences program. In particular, Dr. Kennedy, Thomas, and Taylor teach Statistics (Kennedy) and Research Methods (Kennedy, Thomas, & Taylor), which are required methodology courses for our major. In addition, Dr. Kennedy has added to our curriculum two new courses in the area of applied and social psychology (Health Psychology and Emotion), Dr. Taylor has added two new courses in the area of biological psychology (Introduction to Psychopharmacology and Behavioral Endocrinology), and Dr. Thomas has added both a Cluster A (Memory) and Cluster B course (Adult Development and Aging). We have also added a new lower-level course to our Cluster A (biological psychology offerings), Brain and Behavior (taught by Dr. Penner).

Importantly, many of our new courses serve both Psychology and Neuroscience majors, and several more of our existing courses have now been incorporated in the Neuroscience curriculum. With the restructuring of the Health Sciences major, several of our existing courses have now been incorporated into this major as well.

We are working to restructure one of our capstone offerings, Advanced Research. The course was designed to serve as a capstone experience (which it does) and to give faculty an avenue through which they can be compensated (through teaching credit and time) for their programmatic research involving students. The consensus of our department is that the latter goal is not being met by the course as it is currently structured; the course, which requires oversight of up to eight independent research projects to be completed in a single semester, requires sometimes nearly double the work of other more traditional classes, and the work extends throughout the entire year—beyond the life of the course, when most or all of the students go on to take their research to professional conferences. Our plan for next year is to restructure the course to make it more workable for faculty—we hope to work with our assessor next year to strategize a better plan.

- What was the impetus for these changes (surveys, course evaluations, student performance, departmental conversation, conversations with advisees, etc)?

The development of the new Neuroscience program, the reworking of the Health Science Major led to some of the changes mentioned above.

Additionally, student demand for psychology courses (as evidenced by heavy and persistent

over-enrollment), a growing major, and a growing student body (at the time) led to our need for additional faculty members. The new faculty line areas were determined in part by broader institutional decisions (like the development of the Neuroscience program) but also by students' desire (as evidenced by student responses to our annual senior survey) for more applied courses and more freshmen/sophomore-level options and variety in our Cluster A sequence of courses.

- Have you made any changes to the ways your department gathers information about student development (for example, surveys, rubrics, common exams, alumni feedback, etc)?

Our department has historically collected and currently collects feedback from seniors through our senior survey with a good response rate. The survey is administered annually to graduating seniors and solicits information about our curriculum and faculty and the students' general feel for how the major met their academic needs and career goals. We also keep a database of current graduate placement (as much as we can get).

Looking forward

- For next year, what key area of student development would your department like to focus on? How will you gather information to help you evaluate the current state of your area of focus in order to make evidence-based decisions?

We have two aims for the coming year: 1) to acquire a new tenure-track line for an experimental psychologist who can either increase our applied psychology offerings and/or broaden our curriculum in other ways, and; 2) Revise our Advanced Research course. For our new line proposal, we have already justified our need with high course enrollments, large class sizes, over-enrollments, numbers of declared majors and minors, and general demand. For our Advanced Research revision, we already have a proposal in the works, and are working to revise it. In that proposal, we have researched how other comparable small liberal arts schools have structured their capstone research experience, how the course fits into the curriculum, how it is shared among faculty, what the research expectations are for the students and faculty involved in the course, and how the course instructors are compensated for their time.

Achieving departmental goals for students

- Consider your department learning goals.
The following is a list of our learning goals:
 - to help them develop the capacity to think scientifically about behavior;
 - to produce in them an appreciation for human diversity;
 - to provide them with a sound knowledge base in the discipline;
 - to help them acquire competence in the methodology of psychological research;
 - to allow them the opportunity to gain practical experience in the application of psychology;
 - to strengthen their oral and written communication skills; and
 - to cultivate in them sensitivity to the ethical standards that guide research and practice within the discipline
- Do they accurately reflect your desired student outcomes? If you have not already done so, please explicitly consider where in your curriculum you achieve your goals for student learning.

This can be done through a curricular map or in the form of a narrative.

Please see *attached Learning Goals Matrix*

- What role does your Capstone play in achieving your departmental learning goals? How do you know that students are achieving these goals through the Capstone experience?

Currently, students can fulfill their Capstone experience by enrolling in History and Systems (an overview of the history, evolution, and current state of the field) and Psychology Practicum (a class that is limited to 8 students, who place as psychology interns in local mental health care centers for a semester). These two courses achieve the capstone experience differently—by giving them a broad overview of the field (History and Systems) and by giving them real-world hands-on experience as psychologists (in Psychology Practicum). We also believe that real-world hands-on experience in psychological research, through Advanced Research, is an important experience to offer students. We hope to restructure and re-instate Advanced Research soon to offer a more diverse set of capstone experiences that involve more of our faculty.

- In what ways does your department provide guidance in the effective use of research and information resources?

We require all students to take Research Methods, a course dedicated to learning about and practicing literature review, research design, data analysis, and writing and oral communication.

Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students

- How do your departmental learning goals fit into the new Vision for Student Learning Goals? Which parts of the VSL does your department most contribute to? If you would like to do a mapping, you may wish to use the attached template for VSLG mapping.

Our department's largest contributions are to the goals associated with rigorous inquiry and informed deliberation (L1-L8) and with the goals associated with personal and professional development (WP1-WP6).