

2018-2019 Psychology Department Assessment Report

In the current academic year, the college went through a review by the Higher Learning Commission, which resulted in a great deal of time spent thinking about assessment of student learning and how the goals of Hendrix and the Psychology Department are being assessed. We were asked by your committee to share three things: the rubric we created for our department, our response to the feedback you shared, and an updated Student Assessment Plan. A summary of our discussion and these materials is provided in the rest of this report.

1. Our Rubric – Our department created a rubric to assess the first goal of the Psychology Department (i.e., to help students develop the capacity to think scientifically about behavior) at this year's Fall Faculty Conference (FFC). Here is the rubric that we created:

Assessing Psychology Department Learning Goal #1 – To help students develop the capacity to think scientifically about behavior

Category	Basic	Competent	Exemplary
Basic Knowledge of Scientific Methodology (content, vocabulary, steps, research design)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can recognize the language of research - Beginning to comprehend the scientific method - With help, can identify and acquire appropriate sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competent in the language of research; - Comprehends the scientific method - Able to identify and acquire appropriate sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understands and can apply the language of research independently and with ease - Strong comprehension of the scientific method - Able to identify and acquire the most relevant sources
Application and Extension based on scientific research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to understand or make superficial connections across multiple sources of information and contexts when provided - Able to understand hypothesis testing and recognize its application - Is satisfied with understanding presented material, without further questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes some connections between multiple sources of information or contexts - Able to devise, measure, and assess hypotheses - Questions learned material further, but in unsophisticated ways (e.g., let's not use college students in future research) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequently able to make meaningful connections across multiple sources of information and contexts - Demonstrates ability to independently devise, measure, and assess novel hypotheses - Uses knowledge gained to generate sophisticated follow-up questions
Critical thinking skills (particularly those related to being an informed consumer of knowledge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can recognize that not all sources are equally credible - Struggles to summarize and integrate sources of information - Often relies on intuition and personal experience to make decisions in research contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to effectively analyze source credibility - Able to summarize multiple sources of information, but struggles with integration - Empirical orientation and openness to considering diverse viewpoints based on conflicting theories and data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to effectively analyze source credibility and think critically about quality of source content - Able to summarize multiple sources of information and integrate them to develop new understanding - Makes decisions that are empirically supported and can see how diverse viewpoints can be reconciled

We worked on this rubric at FFC, continued discussion at two additional meetings, and we spent about half of our annual assessment meeting using the rubric to assess three of our graduating senior majors. The overwhelming departmental consensus was that the rubric a) was effective and easy to use, b) was a good

way for us to consider the development of student learning, and c) would be much more effective if we used it immediately after teaching a course, instead of trying to assess students holistically after four years. We noticed that our assessments of the three students were quite different in considering their work in their first two years vs. in their junior and senior year, which is consistent with our goal of these skills developing over time. So, we believe doing an early and a late assessment of student learning will give us better information for assessing students throughout their time with us. We have decided as a department to create one of these rubrics for each of our seven departmental learning goals and to identify courses in which we want to assess students. We have decided to create these rubrics for our second learning goal next year (2019-2020) and to assess our students in Statistics (PSYC 290), Research Methods (PSYC 295), and several other lower level (100 and 200) and upper level (300 and 400) courses. In 2019-2020, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 1 and 2. In 2020-2021, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 3 and 4 and in 2021-2022, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 5, 6, and 7. We believe that this plan will help us have a cycle of departmental assessment that is more systematic than our current approach and can help us in considering long term needs of our majors.

2. Response to feedback from the Assessment Committee. Here is the narrative you sent with along with your committee's evaluation form: *"As you can see from the rubric, we thought your Narrative of Strength met or exceeded standards and your Action Plan for Improvement approached or met standards. The committee would like you to provide us with more information about how all the data you collect is used. We would also like to know more about your Action Plan. Have you run into any difficulties with the complexity of your Mixed Model approach to Advanced Research, or has it been successful? How will you evaluate the success of this model?"*

In general, our Student Assessment Plan involves using the following data:

1. Student scores on the Psychology Major Field Test (MFT)
2. Data gathered annually from faculty regarding the number of presentations, posters, W2 credits, internships, and oral presentations completed by their students
3. Data gathered annually regarding department and related program enrollment, including numbers of Psychology majors and minors (which reflect curricular demands so we can adjust offerings accordingly). One related activity is an annual meeting following spring registration to place students into Psychology courses over the limit, in order to ensure that all of our majors can graduate on time.
4. Data gathered annually in our Senior Survey, in which senior majors reflect on their experience as majors, experiential learning related to Psychology, and our departmental curriculum
5. An external consultation every seven years (most recently, in 2017-2018)

In gathering MFT scores and information about students completing presentations, posters, W2, internships and oral presentations, we look at these numbers in the hope of seeing relative stability. In the past 12 years, our majors have always performed incredibly well on the MFT. We hope and expect the performance of our students to be strong and if we were ever to notice a dip in performance, the MFT is broken down by topic area, so that we could know where to enhance our curricular offerings to increase student success. Generally, student performance off campus (i.e., presentations, posters, and internships) and on campus (i.e., presentations, posters, W2, and oral presentations in courses) has been strong – but, by tracking these numbers, we can address new situations if there are large changes. For example, in a challenging period in our department around 2010, we had an extraordinarily large couple of cohorts of students, which resulted in many classes being over-enrolled by 20-50%. One consequence was a reduction in oral presentations because there wasn't time to have all of those additional students do presentations. But, being aware of this change helped us make pedagogically sound decisions under the logistical constraints posed by our large student cohorts and helped us make a compelling case to expand the size of the department.

We pay careful attention to enrollment numbers because we have faced increasing demand for our courses because of a variety of other majors, specifically Health Science and Neuroscience. Our attention to this information and the challenges we have faced getting our majors the classes they need to graduate on time have resulted in the need for special spring meetings to discuss course placement for seniors who need specific courses to graduate. We also discuss the results of our Senior Survey every year, which helps us identify areas of student concern, courses our students would like to see, and to consider the constructive feedback offered by students about our curriculum.

All together, these pieces of data are used to inform our position requests, changes to our curriculum (both in terms of content we might add and in terms of the level of needed courses), and to prepare us to most fully engage in the process of outside evaluation.

To fully answer your questions, I need to update your committee on the feedback our department received in the fall from our Area Chair and the Provost, at the close of our external review, which was conducted by Dr. Tyler Lorig in 2017-2018. In our self-evaluation submitted before the external review, the department's self-assessment stressed that a) we are struggling to have enough seats for our majors in Psychology courses, b) we are committed to keeping the Psychology Majors Field Test (MFT) and wish the administration would support this financially (which they were able to do until just a few years ago), and c) we needed a massive re-vamping of our Advanced Research course. All three of these topics are based on the assessment data we collect, including senior surveys, presentations at conferences (which are often based on research collected in an Advanced Research courses that involve Experiential Learning projects and/or Internships), the data about our students' scores on the MFT (which are compared to national norms), and our students' ability to take W2 courses in Psychology.

Regarding our first concern about the challenges we face getting majors seated in courses, we greatly appreciated the administration's willingness to prioritize Psychology majors in Psychology courses starting in Spring 2019 registration and to allow us to replace the Visiting Assistant Professor we have had on campus for the past three years with another Visiting position.

Our second concern had to do with the MFT and the fact that students now pay out of pocket for the test (\$25 per student), which creates a financial hardship for some of our majors. We were told by the administration that students will need to continue paying for the exam, even though they understand our departmental concerns about this practice. Our department was also encouraged, if we did not feel justified in asking students to pay for the exam, to consider dropping the MFT from our departmental assessment plan because of the many other ways in which we assess student learning. In the spring, we were told we can no longer conduct the MFT during the 8 am – 4 pm academic day (historically, we give the MFT from 2-5 pm on one Friday each semester). Because our department does not have a Senior Seminar, which other departments use to administer this multi-hour exam to their majors, we will need to either administer the exam on the weekend or at night. Pushing the MFT out of the academic day poses several large logistical challenge in terms of both test support (from both Hendrix IT and ETS) and scheduling our large number of majors (for both students who work, play sports, are involved in choir or music ensemble, or participate in extracurricular activities, we well as for faculty schedules). We feel strongly as a department that the MFT is a critical piece of our assessment, because it is the only portion of our assessment that is standardized and nationally normed – allowing us to assess the overall Psychology education we offer to students, relative to other institutions. However, we will be spending a good deal of time in 2019-2020 discussing our plan moving forward, given these new guidelines about MFT timing.

Our third concern had to do with re-working our system of Advanced Research so that we could offer students this incredible opportunity in a way that was more sustainable for our schedules and workloads. We were told by the administration that there is no way that we can consider a banking system (i.e., one in which faculty receive course credit after supervising 8 projects, which could be spread across multiple years) because of concerns about the legality of banking credits under federal labor laws. This leaves us with only our current option of a single semester class. Unfortunately, this is the system we were trying to move away from with our mixed model because it has been nearly impossible to fit this course into our teaching loads because of course releases related to administrative work and our participation in college service classes like TEC, resulting in Advanced Research only being offered 1 time – and only because of an Odyssey Professorship that functionally created a course release for this class – since 2015-2016. Despite talking a great deal about this over the past two years, we do not have a good plan as a department for how to move forward with this, so we will continue to discuss it next year.

3. Updated Student Learning Plan – We had an extensive discussion about our student learning plan at our assessment meeting. I have included our updated Student Learning Plan, which now contains both the Vision for Student Learning Mapping and the Curricular Mapping included in the document, with this report. In discussing changes to our Student Learning Plan, we discussed four major things: using rubrics to create cycles of assessment for our learning goals, our use of the Psychology Major Field Test for our capstone grade, having a better connection between our departmental learning goals and our senior survey, and our decision to collect student papers.

As explained above, we have decided as a department to create rubrics for each of our seven departmental learning goals and to identify different courses to assess each year. In 2019-2020, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 1 and 2. In 2020-2021, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 3 and 4. In 2021-2022, we will assess students on departmental learning goals 5, 6, and 7.

We also feel strongly about keeping our MFT for senior Psychology majors to assess the quality of our curriculum. However, it feels possible that this might be the last year for us with the MFT because of the logistical constraints mentioned above, in which case we will be discussing what data or assessment might replace the MFT for our department. One option we have discussed is adding a Senior Seminar for our majors, which would give us class time to administer the MFT and could also involve faculty rotating the teaching of the course from week to week. But, we are in the earliest stages of considering other alternatives and I expect to be able to report more back at the end of 2019-2020.

We also discussed more systematically using our senior survey to ask targeted questions about the departmental learning goals we are assessing in the given year. We will likely add questions about the academic skills we wanted our majors to develop and ask students to identify the activities and courses that helped them develop these skills. Parallel to our use of rubrics, we will assess learning goals 1 and 2 in 2019-2020, learning goals 3 and 4 in 2020-2021, and learning goals 5-7 in 2021-2022. This change will allow us to use our senior survey to get targeted feedback about our learning goals from our graduating majors.

Finally, we have eliminated our collection of student papers beginning in Spring 2019. There was a lot of misunderstanding about why we were collecting papers and we never assessed these papers as a department. In addition, due to the variability in paper length and type of writing assignments, we have decided that this data wasn't really helping us assess student learning. Next year, we will think about how we might more effectively assess student writing and the department would consider adding back the collection of student papers if we can determine how to make this data more effective for our use in improving the quality of the education we offer to students.