

External Review Panel Report on the Department of Psychology
BA in Psychology and MA in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

East Carolina University

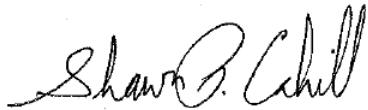
Prepared for

Academic Program Planning and Development

Division of Academic Affairs

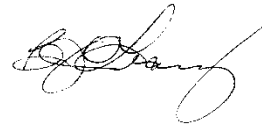
East Carolina University

By



Dr. Shawn Cahill

University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee



Dr. Brian O'Leary

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga



Dr. Steve Culver

East Carolina University

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INTRODUCTION

The three person Review Committee, consisting of one internal reviewer, Dr. Steve Culver of the Geological Sciences Department, and two external reviewers, Dr. Brian O'Leary of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and Dr. Shawn Cahill of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, met with representatives of East Carolina University on October 15 and 16, 2012, to review the internal self-study report for the Department of Psychology. Our focus was on only two of the five major degree programs under the purview of the Department: the undergraduate Bachelor of Arts program and the Masters of Arts in Industrial-Organizational Psychology.

Included in our discussions were ECU administrators, tenured and tenure-track faculty, administrative staff, fixed-term and part-time faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, members of internal and external constituencies with ties to the Department, and the chair of the Department. The process was well-organized by Dr. Linner Griffin and the members of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Psychology. Through these discussions, we obtained a broad understanding of departmental processes and the Department's role in the College and the University. Everyone we met with was courteous, helpful and provided relevant information. Our goal was to provide an external perspective on their self-study, identify departmental strengths and opportunities for improvement, and make recommendations for improvements.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Psychology program, initially within the Department of Education, became an independent department with two faculty members in 1950. The program has grown over the past 60 years to 30 tenured or tenure-track faculty members, six fixed-term faculty members, 12 part-time faculty members and five administrative support staff. A search is currently underway for two tenure-track faculty members and a Chair.

In 1956 the Department began to offer a Psychology minor and a liberal arts degree with a major in Psychology commenced in 1959. An MA degree specializing in Clinical Psychology began in 1962. In 1963 the Clinical Psychology MA was listed in the ECC Bulletin with an MA in General Psychology and an MA in School Psychology. In the mid-1970s an Industrial-Organizational concentration was developed within the General Psychology MA program. A PhD program in Health Psychology, with Clinical Health and Pediatric School concentrations, admitted its first class in 2007. A concentration in Occupational Health will admit its first students in fall of 2013.

Associated with the initiation and expansion of the PhD program, MA degree offerings have been adjusted. The MA in General Psychology is being discontinued. Those currently in the program will be allowed to graduate and no additional students will be admitted. The Department now offers the PhD in Health Psychology, an MA in School Psychology (MA/CAS) and an MA in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. These graduate programs continue to complement the BA in Psychology.

DEPARTMENTAL STRENGTHS

What became clear from our review of the self-study report and our discussions the various constituencies within and outside of ECU, is that the BA in Psychology and the MA in Industrial-Organizational Psychology are, and are considered to be, high quality programs. The Department has a group of highly motivated and competent faculty who are committed to quality in teaching, research, and service. The Department's administrative staff is well-organized and efficient, and is well-regarded by other department members.

This report will address the strengths and opportunities for improvements in each program separately.

General Departmental Strengths

At the departmental level, we were impressed with the quality and organization of the support staff. These five people perform a range of tasks that enable the department to perform at a high level. They work as a team and provide assistance to each other as needed. Of particular importance to the research goals for research and external funding are the efforts of the departmental grants assistant, Vickie Crafford. Her expertise will help to ensure that the department continues to propose and receive the number of grant dollars required to support the department's various programs.

Another strength identified in our review was that tenure-track faculty felt that the tenure review process was transparent and understandable. Further, non-tenured faculty were very satisfied with mentoring activities within the department, including monthly meetings related to portfolio preparation and mentoring meetings covering relevant topics.

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

The courses taught in the BA in Psychology serve an important role in undergraduate education at ECU. With approximately 500 undergraduate majors, Psychology is a significant presence in the College of Arts and Sciences and a major component of the Liberal Arts at ECU. In addition to providing numerous Foundations courses to baccalaureate students from across the University, several Psychology courses are also required for major or minor credit in other departments. A very large number of students in the College of Arts and Sciences, and many students in professional degree programs will take a Psychology course, either as an elective or a required course, before they graduate.

With such a large demand for Psychology courses, it is no surprise that the department is among the most productive in the College of Arts and Sciences in terms of Student Credit Hours (SCH). The size of the faculty is appropriate for this level of activity. Of particular note is the creativity of faculty in teaching large course sections (75+) while still retaining a writing component and implementing break out groups. They also require a course in pedagogy for PhD students prior to them teaching an Introductory Psychology course. The PhD students repeat this course each semester they teach at ECU. This not only provides them with valuable experience and feedback that will help them in the future careers, but helps to insure high quality undergraduate instruction in psychology at ECU.

The department also encourages undergraduates to actively participate in research, with approximately 100 students currently assisting in research at some level. This opportunity to engage in research provides students with hands-on experience that enhances their attractiveness for selection into quality graduate programs. The faculty have recently made efforts to promote undergraduate students' involvement in research by developing a website wherein interested students can learn about faculty who are attempting to recruit research assistants and complete an application form that will permit faculty to identify strong candidates to assist with their research.

Master of Arts in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

With the discontinuation of the Academic and Research concentrations, the MA in I-O Psychology is the sole remaining concentration under the General-Theoretic MA Program. That said, the I-O program at ECU is rigorous, well organized, and prepares its students for related jobs. The selection process is competitive with students from excellent undergraduate institutions from around the country providing a diverse and extremely qualified cohort. The program is structured in accordance with the guidelines suggested by the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology (SIOP), which is Division 14 of the American Psychological Association (APA). Two features that distinguish the ECU I-O programs from many competing programs are the requirements that all students complete an empirical thesis and that they complete 400 hours of I-O related practicum experience, all within two years. Further, both the Dean of Arts and Sciences and the Dean of the Graduate School commented on the high quality of the theses submitted by students in the I-O program. The combination of these factors speaks to the rigor of the program and bodes well for student employment prospects upon graduation. This is evidenced by the success the Department has had in placing its graduates in degree-relevant positions over the years.

Given the size of the program, approximately 11 students per year, the number of faculty associated with the program appears to be adequate, although the advent of the new PhD program in Occupational Health Psychology may place a strain on existing resources. Faculty in the I-O program maintain a high level of research activity, with recent publications in quality, peer-reviewed journals. The level of grantsmanship, particularly given the very applied nature of I-O psychology and the many alternative sources of external funding, is adequate.

DEPARTMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

- 1) The University as a whole does not appear to have a unified perspective on the structure and focus of undergraduate education. With the growing emphasis on graduate programs, particularly at the PhD level, it is important for the University and the Department of Psychology to protect their commitment to and the quality of its undergraduate programs. This includes focusing on student engagement and stressing the importance of a liberal arts education in the modern world.

- 2) While we recognize the limitations placed on student selection at the University level, the current admission standards for entry into the BA program in Psychology may place the department at a significant disadvantage relative to other programs with higher entry requirements. To be admitted to the BA in Psychology, a student need only have completed PSY 1000 or 1060 with a grade of C or better and have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0. Because these standards are below those of some other majors in the College of Arts and Sciences and other colleges, Psychology may be seen as a “fall back” major for underachieving students. With the increasing emphasis at the UNC System level on retention and graduation rates for funding purposes, it is important that the Department be allowed to raise their admission standards to those set by other departments, or be provided sufficient funding and resources to provide remedial services to those less-qualified students declaring a Psychology major.
- 3) The department has a history of providing service learning and applied practicum experiences to its students, either as components of existing courses, or through the Volunteer and Service Learning Center (VSLC). These opportunities are critical to the University’s service commitment to the surrounding community and to providing students with hands-on experiencing in the field. Having spoken with representatives from several local volunteer organizations, we suggest that the Department of Psychology revitalize its emphasis on service learning and work closely with the VSLC to coordinate student practicum efforts. This renewed emphasis should not preclude direct contact between the Department and the volunteer organizations. In our opinion, it is of particular importance to the volunteer organizations that Psychology provide its students with opportunities for extended assignments in the organization. Currently, the number of contact hours in a given class typically range from 10 to 30 a semester. While these efforts are appreciated, many of the agencies could use 100 plus hours of support by individual students to foster development of relationships with agency clients. For example, a child with autism is better served by a longer term relationship with one student than by a series of shorter term relationships. We suggest that the Department explore methods for improving the level of service learning and applied practicum hours available to Psychology majors.
- 4) With the development of the new Honors College, it appears that the Department of Psychology is underrepresented in the College given the number of majors. The Department should take an active role in providing courses for the Honors College and in recruiting highly qualified students who can enhance the Department’s undergraduate reputation.
- 5) Distance learning is another area where the Department of Psychology must balance the needs of its majors with University policy and strategy. Distance learning provides the Department with scheduling flexibility and efficient utilization of facilities, as well as providing educational opportunities to students who cannot attend classes on campus. However, the Department should examine the balance between face-to-face and online courses to ensure that student preferences and needs are met. In discussions with senior Psychology majors, for example, we were told that three of four capstone courses available during the semester were provided online, resulting in limited opportunities to participate in a face-to-face seminar environment. We suggest that the Department survey its students, possibly as part of a College of Arts and Sciences initiative, to determine the demand for online courses and develop the curriculum accordingly.

- 6) In our discussions with Psychology majors, one area that seemed particularly inconsistent across students was their satisfaction with the advisement process. The Department spends a great deal of time and resources on advisement, so it would be helpful to review the process to ensure that students receive consistently useful information. We recognize that the quality of advisement is dependent on student preparation and participation which is inconsistent at best, but the process should ensure that advisors are responsive, available, and knowledgeable about how to provide a successful advisement experience. With the increased emphasis on retention and graduation, a quality advisement process is critical to achieving University goals.
- 7) Another area for improvement identified by Psychology majors was instruction on how to read and interpret a journal article. Students complained that they were first given articles in their Research Methods class, but had little idea of how to attack the complex combination of theory, data, and analysis with which they were presented. As a result, many students simply skimmed the articles to find answers to quiz questions without attempting to understand the depth of the information provided in the article. This approach continued for many of them throughout their academic careers. As journal articles are an important source of information in the psychological sciences, the Department should provide an appropriate level of tutoring on reading and interpreting journal articles as early in the academic cycle as possible. This could be accomplished through separate training sessions, or be integrated into the early sessions of the Research Methods course. There are also several articles available on how to read a journal article, including *How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology* by Christian H. Jordan and Mark P. Zanna (1999).
- 8) Having successfully created the PhD in Occupational Health Psychology, the Department needs to revisit its allocation of resources between the various programs, including reemphasizing its commitment to the BA. Undergraduate education is currently heavily dependent upon fixed-term faculty, many of whom have already served the University for a number of years. While these faculty are highly experienced, well-qualified, and committed, teaching 4-4 academic loads, they continue to be retained on one-year contracts, which can negatively impact consistency of instruction and negatively affect their motivation and job satisfaction. While we recognize the need for financial flexibility in uncertain economic times, we also believe that the University should recognize the critical role played by fixed-term faculty by examining the possibility of extending contract terms based on the number of years of service.
- 9) To address the increasing demand for undergraduate courses, both tenured and tenure-track faculty recommended the addition of two tenure-track lines dedicated to the BA. We concur with this recommendation with some reservations. As the Promotion and Tenure committee membership transitions from those focused primarily on undergraduate education to those more focused on graduate education, it is important that the tenure prospects for new tenure-track faculty brought in to fill undergraduate roles are not handicapped by expectations for levels of grants and research that are inconsistent with that role. We are not suggesting that standards should be relaxed for anyone, simply that the balance between teaching, research and service reflect the different roles that exist in the Department and that each role be equally valued in the tenure process.

Master of Arts in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

- 1) The I-O students we talked to agreed that one of the most pressing issues is finding a paid internship to fulfill the requirement for 400 contact hours for their practicum. In recent years, many companies with ties to the I-O program have left the Greenville area reducing the number of ongoing internships available to students. While students can get a relevant internship anywhere in the country, many students would prefer to remain in Greenville over the summer between their first and second years due to housing commitments. We recommend that the faculty associated with the I-O program make a concerted effort to increase the number of relationships they have with organizations throughout the region to enhance the internship opportunities available to I-O students.
- 2) An important component of an MA in I-O Psychology is the opportunity to network with academicians, professionals and other students at professional and academic conferences. Travel funds for conference attendance by Masters-level students at ECU are limited, particularly for those who are not presenting at a conference. Because of the relatively short two-year duration of the program, it is very difficult for students to develop original research for timely submission, particularly given that students do not begin serious work on their theses until the summer after their first year. The Department should work with the College of Arts and Sciences and the University to develop creative sources of travel funding.
- 3) I-O Psychology is a very applied discipline that provides myriad opportunities for well-compensated, degree-relevant employment upon graduation with an MA. Students communicated a concern that they were not well informed about their career options and career development, particularly in a consulting or entrepreneurial role. They requested, and we concur, that the Department develop a course on how to practice as a consulting I-O practitioner that includes alumni and practitioner involvement. We also recommend that the program consider creating a student chapter of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM – www.shrm.org). SHRM provides a variety of resources and training that is relevant to I-O MA graduates.
- 4) Finally, and as mentioned elsewhere in this report, the creation of the PhD concentration in Occupational Health Psychology (OHP) should serve to enhance and not detract from the established MA in I-O Psychology. The MA has established a tradition of excellence over a long period; its continued excellence is critical to the success of the PhD in OHP. Moving forward, there will be two equally important tracks available to students entering the program: those students pursuing the MA and those pursuing the PhD. The Department must balance its commitment to both tracks without siphoning resources from either, or undervaluing the importance or qualifications of the MA students.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Psychology, and specifically the Bachelor of Arts and the Masters of Arts in Industrial Organizational Psychology, is serving the best interests of its faculty, majors and the University. The challenges before the Department are important but not overwhelming. Of utmost importance is to maintain the Department's historic commitment to quality undergraduate education, while balancing the needs of the existing MA in I-O program with those of the new PhD concentration in OHP. Based on our interaction with Department administration, faculty, staff and students, we believe they are quite capable of achieving that balance.