

Department of Psychology Unit Response Report following Academic Program Review Spring, 2013

A three-member (Shawn Cahill, Brian O’Leary and Steve Culver) external review panel provided a report on the Department of Psychology (DP) in November, 2012. The report was directed at both the undergraduate (UG) B.A. program in Psychology and the graduate M.A. program in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. The report offered a very favorable assessment of the department and these two programs in particular. They described the programs as being high quality, the faculty as highly motivated and competent, and the staff as organized and effective. The review panel, however, did identify several opportunities for improvement of both programs.

Psychology B.A. Program.

Nine opportunities for improvement of the UG B.A. program were identified. These are addressed in sequence below. Responses include descriptions of how the suggested improvements will be addressed, who will take the specified actions, and when the actions are expected to be taken. The set of point-by-point responses is followed by a prioritization of the actions in terms of associated resource needs.

1. *The external review panel recommends that the DP protect the commitment to and quality of the UG program by a) focusing on student engagement and b) stressing the importance of a liberal arts education.*

The DP currently focuses on student engagement in several ways. Students are encouraged to participate in Psi Chi (the UG student honors society) and Psychology Club, to take advantage of opportunities to engage in fieldwork, to become involved in research with departmental faculty, and to complete two-semester, faculty-mentored senior thesis projects. Ongoing efforts to increase involvement via e-mail announcements, Internet presence, academic advising, orientation meetings for majors, and regularly-held information meetings will continue, and an increased effort to engage students in fieldwork and internships will be made. (See item 3 below.)

Updated American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major are currently being drafted by a group headed by Jane Halonen, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of West Florida. These guidelines (originally published in 2007) for developing quality undergraduate programs in psychology place special “emphasis on the advantages of studying psychology as a strong liberal arts preparation for attaining a position in the professional workforce.” Starting in 2013, the DP UG Committee has been reviewing these guidelines so as to determine how best to insure that departmental practices remain in line with these national standards for the discipline. The Guidelines include 10 goals in two areas of emphasis:

I. Knowledge, Skills and Values Consistent With the Science and Application of Psychology, and II. Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent With Liberal Arts Education That Are Further Developed in Psychology.

These discussions have focused on addressing three key questions: 1) How can the objectives of a liberal arts education best be met within the context of courses that traditionally serve as overviews of content areas (e.g., the biological bases of behavior courses)? 2) How can a strong and consistent focus on the goals of a liberal arts education be best maintained in the courses for which this is the primary purpose (i.e., the capstone courses)? 3) What changes to outcomes assessment might be needed to determine if the DP is meeting the desired liberal arts education goals?

Beginning in 2013, ECU initiated Write Where You Belong as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The focus of this five-year plan is to help students succeed as writers by providing 1) a bigger and better University Writing Center, 2) writing mentors for writing intensive courses, and 3) expanded and improved online writing support. A DP liaison to the QEP has been established and regular meetings between the liaison and faculty who teach writing intensive courses (Research Methods, Capstone courses, and honors sections of Introductory Psychology and Developmental Psychology) have begun. The goals of these meetings are 1) to discuss and share practices that enhance the teaching of writing, 2) to increase faculty awareness of and engagement with the resources provided by the QEP, and 3) to establish means by which the DP might best assess the effectiveness of writing instruction of undergraduate students. Because learning to write is at the core of a strong liberal arts education, these efforts are in line with the recommendations of the external review panel.

The DP will also act to increase student awareness of the importance of a liberal arts education in several other ways. Drawing from the APA Guidelines mentioned above, we will update our goals for our Undergraduate Program. The goals will be electronically distributed to intended psychology majors, declared psychology majors, and Introductory Psychology (PSYC 1000) students at the start of each semester beginning in August 2013. The DP webpage will also be updated to include a link to a page that provides this information.

In addition, beginning in May 2013, discussion of the nature and importance of liberal arts education will be a topic that will be added to freshmen orientation meetings provided by the director of the UG program throughout the summer of every year. Furthermore, instructors of Introductory Psychology (PSYC 1000, 1060) and Careers in Psychology (2211) will be encouraged to include this topic as part of an introductory lecture at the start of each semester beginning in August 2013.

2. *The external review panel recommends that the DP a) establish more rigorous standards for declaration of the psychology major, and b) receive funding and resources so that remedial services can be offered to less-qualified majors.*

The UG Committee is currently developing a set of proposed changes to the UG program in psychology. Among the changes under consideration is an increase in the GPA requirement for declaration of the major. If this proposed change meets with general departmental approval, a formal program change will be requested in the fall of 2013. If the request is approved at all administrative levels, the increased GPA requirement could take effect as soon as fall 2014. We have examined GPA data for our majors and think that requiring a C+ (2.3 GPA) would be a good increment for raising the GPA for declaring a Psychology major. In January we had 437 Psychology majors with a 2.0 or above, 406 with a 2.2, and 340 with a 2.5.

Currently, the psychology major can be declared by any student meeting a set of minimal requirements. (They must have completed at least 40 hours of UG coursework, have earned at least a C in Introductory Psychology, and meet the minimal GPA requirement.) In addition to raising the GPA requirement for majors, a new, formal major application process will be developed. We envisage this process requiring students to complete two new procedures before declaring psychology as the major beginning in the fall of 2014.

First, students will complete an online training module that provides instruction on the rigors of the major and the career opportunities and requirements most relevant to the major. The intention is to insure that all majors are aware 1) that psychology is a scientific discipline of theory-driven research activities associated with the same methodological precision required by other scientific fields of study, and 2) of the basic facts regarding the career opportunities available to those who graduate with a B.A. in Psychology. Students will be required to pass a brief face-to-face test for understanding of the material covered in the online module before they can declare the major.

The most challenging courses for psychology majors are undoubtedly those that make up the biological bases of behavior group. We are also considering developing an additional prerequisite to declaring the psychology major, in which students will complete a basic science knowledge screening test. This test would be designed to determine whether or not students have mastered the fundamental scientific concepts needed to be prepared to succeed in the biological bases of behavior courses. Students would not be required to pass this test. Instead, screening test scores would be used to advise students about appropriate course choices within the major field of study. In particular, plans are underway to offer remedial neuroscience classes for students who score poorly on the screening tool. These special sections of PSYC 2250 (Selected Topics in Psychology) would be available to all students who have completed Introductory Psychology, but would be populated primarily by students identified as at risk during the screening process. Intended majors would also be encouraged to take this course as a sophomore elective by the General Advising Center prior to declaring the major so as to be well-prepared for the challenges of the major course of study.

As mentioned above, writing mentors are a resource provided by ECU's QEP, Write Where You Belong. Use of the writing mentoring program will be encouraged for all writing intensive classes and will play an important role in expanding the opportunities students have for receiving tutoring. In addition, discussions concerning the formation of a departmental tutoring service are underway. Although only in the initial phases of planning, the goal is to establish a space within the department dedicated to tutoring (perhaps in conjunction with advising). Tutors would be upperclassmen recruited by course instructors and from Psi Chi and Psychology Club. Tutors would enroll in a training course and would receive course credit for participation in duties carried out at the center. Faculty would run the tutoring classes and supervise the activities of the center and these activities would make-up part of their regular teaching load (rather than being taken on as an overload). We are reviewing an initiative developed in the Criminal Justice program in which a professor teaching a course with a high failure rate partnered with the Pirate Tutoring Center to offer tutoring in this course. This could be another avenue for scaffolding student performance in our biological bases courses.

3. *The external review panel recommends that the DP “explore methods for improving the level of service-learning and applied practicum hours available to Psychology majors,” and such efforts are currently underway. The DP interprets this suggestion as encouraging an increase in the number of opportunities for student engagement in the broadest sense, including volunteer work, internships, and research experience.*

A departmental repository for information about opportunities for internship, volunteer work, and research involvement has been established, the departmental webpage has been updated so that the information will also be available online and kept current, and regular electronic dissemination of related announcements to declared psychology majors has begun. In addition, the UG Committee is currently discussing ways that faculty might be encouraged to incorporate service learning into the Selected Topics in Psychology (PSYC 2250) and Advanced Topics Seminar (PSYC 4250) courses. Furthermore, efforts to educate faculty about the nature of service learning are underway. In particular, a representative from the Volunteer and Service-Learning Center will provide a very brief introduction to the topic at an upcoming faculty meeting and will lead a more extensive instructional session with interested faculty later in the semester.

The UG Committee of the DP is currently developing a proposal to change the catalog description of our Field Experience courses (PSYC 4990, 4991, 4992). The current requirements of the course demand a prohibitive number of hours of work and, therefore, are likely deterring students from engaging in this form of applied coursework. If approved, the change would allow students to earn one semester hour of credit for every three hours of fieldwork completed every week of the semester. This means that a student enrolled in three semester hours of Field Experience would provide more than 100 hours of service in the course of a semester. Most psychology courses earn students three semester hours of credit.

Historically, a single faculty member, Jeannie Golden, has assumed the responsibility for supervising the vast majority (frequently all) of the students engaged in Field Experience. Recently, several other faculty members have expressed interest in working in such supervisory capacities, but have felt uncertain about the necessary procedures. In order to address this issue, the acting department chair, Susan McCammon, has drafted a document that provides a detailed explanation of the how faculty can assume Field Experience responsibilities. The UG Committee will refine the document, and it will be distributed to all DP faculty beginning in May 2013.

4. *The external review panel suggests that the DP is underrepresented in the Honors College and recommends that it a) provide more courses for the Honors College, and b) recruit more students from the Honors College.*

We have several faculty interested in teaching courses for the Honors College. Interested instructors, however, cannot simply elect such teaching assignments. A formal and competitive application process is involved, and only a small number of applicants are granted the privilege of teaching courses for the Honors College each semester. In addition, the Honors College imposes strict limitations upon the frequency with which any particular faculty member can teach courses for their students. Thus, the Honors College imposes restrictions upon the degree to which we can become involved. Nevertheless, the DP has adopted a goal of submitting two teaching proposals to the Honors College each year. One of our faculty was selected, and taught an Honors Seminar this year.

Subsequent to the external review panel's site visit, a policy of inviting Honors College students without intended majors to participate in Psychology Club meetings and other departmental events was instituted as a means of attracting them to the major. In the spring of 2013, the DP also began participating in the annual Honors College Open House event. A representative from the DP was available for two hours to engage prospective students in face-to-face discussion about the psychology major and the experiences that the DP makes available to students. Beginning in the fall of 2013, AP Psychology students from local high schools will be invited to join the departmental Psychology Club as a means of recruiting students who may be especially qualified to enter the Honors College. In addition, special events for AP Psychology students may be organized by Psi Chi as a way of familiarizing especially talented high school students with the DP and the Honors College.

Another way of increasing involvement with the Honors College is by offering more existing honors classes (i.e., Honors Introductory Psychology, PSYC 1060) or honors sections of existing classes (e.g., Developmental Psychology, PSYC 3206). In the past, however, these classes and sections were associated with such low enrollments that the DP could not justify offering them on a regular basis. In order to address this problem, starting with the spring 2014 schedule (the fall 2013 schedule

is already in place), the DP Schedule Committee will begin consulting with the Honors College so as to coordinate honors course offerings with the schedules of honors students. If special efforts are made to schedule our honors classes on days and times that are most accommodating to honors students, perhaps the problem of low enrollments will be overcome.

It should be kept in mind that the Honors College is run according to procedures that do not facilitate the involvement of major departments. For example, only high school students are admitted to the college; students already attending ECU cannot join the Honors College. This means that college students who have proven their excellence in university-level work, and with whom DP members have the greatest contact and familiarity, are not eligible to join the college. It should be noted, therefore, that restrictions of this sort constitute serious impediments to increasing the DP's role in the Honors College. Nevertheless, during the spring 2013 UG Committee meetings, discussions about how to recruit more Honors College students to the major will continue. Any new strategies resulting from these discussions will be implemented as soon as possible.

5. *In order to best meet student needs, the external review panel suggests that the DP survey students to determine online course demands.*

In the fall of 2013, the UG Committee will electronically survey psychology majors to determine the relative need for online and face-to-face courses. Data will be used to guide relevant class scheduling decisions. If there is interest in such a survey at the HCAS level (as mentioned by reviewers), we would be happy to cooperate with College efforts.

6. *The external review panel recommends that the DP review the academic advising process with the goal of insuring that advisors are knowledgeable, available, and responsive to students.*

The UG Committee has conducted the recommended review of advising practices, and has looked at advising models in other departments. The Committee drafted a proposal to establish a departmental Advising/Tutoring/Student Success Center, presented it to the Psychology faculty on April 29, and obtained their endorsement. We are beginning to put the plan in place, so that operations will begin by the fall of 2013.

We plan to develop an advising/tutoring center that we hope to staff at least from noon-5:00pm Monday through Thursday. The eventual goal would be that the designated advisors could handle all advising related DegreeWorks reports and Senior Summaries (about 200 needed each year). The advisor(s) would establish and maintain an advising website, organize regular UG information sessions, maintain a library of UG resources, distribute UG announcements, and recruit and supervise student tutors. We will also investigate the placement of a writing tutor. Space for the center has been identified. The Martoccia Library (Rawl 302) would

be suitable for this use, as it already has several computer carrels and tables at which tutoring could take place. A desk for a faculty or staff advisor has been ordered for the room, and relevant books will be ordered over the summer (e.g. *The Guide to Graduate Programs in Psychology*, the *APA Publication Manual*, *Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*). Contact has been made with the Martoccia family, and they are supportive of this use. Consultation has been obtained from Jayne Geissler, who will work with the department Chair to write a proposal for funding a full-time advisor position for the center. The greatest need is in staffing the center. We hope to accomplish this with a combination of a full-time MA level staff advisor and faculty reassigned from teaching (one course reassignment per semester for each 10 hours of Center work). Non-advising faculty would be asked to commit to presenting information sessions on various topics (e.g., “So, you want to be a clinical psychologist,” “So, you want to be a forensic psychologist”) and to staff group advising sessions.

At present the ECU DP webpage does not include any academic advising resources. The UG Committee will develop an online advisee tutorial as well and set of informational webpages that will include links to documents and resources that advisees frequently need. The advising website used by UNC Charlotte appears to be an especially thorough example and may serve as a model for this work.

7. *The external review panel recommends that the DP “provide an appropriate level of tutoring on reading and interpreting journal articles as early in the academic cycle as possible.”*

Requiring students to read journal articles and coaching them in this important activity is currently at the core of our required Research Methods (PSYC 2210) course. It is also a skill that is emphasized in Selected Topics in Psychology (PSYC 2250). As both of these are 2000-level courses, these opportunities are already available to students as early as their freshmen year.

Throughout the next year the UG Committee will continue to discuss ways in which the DP might enhance our students’ skills at comprehending research reports. These steps could include encouraging instructors of other 2000-level courses to include more journal-reading activities in their classes, making online training modules available to students, and introducing lectures about the topic to the Introductory Psychology syllabi. Whatever changes are ultimately adopted, they would be implemented beginning in January 2014.

8. *The external review panel recommends “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.”*

The DP is in complete agreement with this recommendation and will resume issuing multiple-year contracts for full-time fixed-term faculty as soon as allowed by the ECU

administration. We were allowed this spring to offer one of the full-time fixed term faculty a two-year contract.

9. *The external review panel recommends that two new tenure-track lines dedicated to the B.A. be added so as to meet recent increased demands for faculty dedicated to the program. They emphasized the importance of not handicapping these hires chances of attaining tenure by expecting them to achieve the same level of grant activity and research productivity as faculty primary involved in the graduate programs. Instead, they encouraged the view that a different but equally-valued balance of teaching, research, and service would need to be used as a criterion for success.*

The need for additional tenure-track positions with the responsibility to devote at least half of the teaching assignment to the undergraduate program will be discussed with the Dean of HCAS and the Provost. If such positions are allocated to the DP, searches for qualified faculty would begin immediately. One way of addressing the reviewers' concern that new UG hires could be at a disadvantage with regards to meeting established progress towards tenure criteria, could be to seek new faculty with research foci in the teaching of Psychology. This strategy would allow us to bolster the existing faculty that focus on UG education by adding members who conduct related research and, therefore, whose research productivity would be less likely to fall below the usual expectation. The reviewers noted the importance of balancing support for our undergraduate program with support for our developing doctoral programs. The need for faculty positions plays into this dynamic. With the loss of two senior faculty with main responsibility in the graduate programs, there is pressing need for their replacement. These needs are in addition to the need identified by the reviewers for faculty to primarily teach in the undergraduate program.

Resources needed. Only two of our responses to the recommendations of the external review panel are associated with new resource needs. The need for two new tenure-track faculty lines dedicated to the B.A. is of the highest priority. The need for staffing for a new DP Tutoring/Advising Center is the next priority.

Industrial/Organizational M.A. Program.

1. The reviewers recommended that we “*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.*”

A faculty member has been assigned to research and develop new internship site participants, with assignments to:

- a) Assume primary responsibility (I/O faculty or staff) to oversee internship site development and maintenance.
- b) Develop and maintain an I/O alumni data-base to allow past students to serve as internship sources.

- c) Develop closer ties with local, regional and national host organizations (ex., NCIOP, SHRM, SIOP, and SOHP) that maintain contact lists for internships.
- d) Add a page to the I/O web site that provides an electronic interface with the various sources listed above that will allow “one-stop shopping” for students hoping to find a suitable summer internship.

2. The reviewers recommended we “*should work with the College of Arts and Sciences and the University to develop creative sources of travel funding... for conference attendance by Masters-level students.*”

Without the development of additional revenue streams, funding for Master’s level graduate student travel is probably unrealistic given the current funding climate.

Departmental travel funding for faculty is currently set at \$750.00 per academic year due to resource limitations. Although highly encouraged, graduate level travel is probably not a reasonable departmental priority at this time.

However, faculty will be encouraged to add money for travel to grant applications that can augment funding from departmental/college sources.

3a. The review panel recommended we “*develop a course on how to practice as a consulting I-O practitioner that includes alumni and practitioner involvement.*”

The program faculty do **not** feel that a separate course on consulting is appropriate at the Master’s level, given that practice issues are discussed in almost all of the existing I/O courses and specifically in PSYC 6343 (Organizational Behavior), and 6420 (Personnel).

Although many Master’s level students obtain jobs in consulting firms, few work as stand-alone practitioners without further training at the doctoral level (<http://www.siop.org/guidelines.aspx>; Schippmann, J. S., Schmitt, S. D., & Hawthorne, S. L. (1992). I-O work roles: Ph.D. vs. master's level practitioners. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 29(4), 3539). In addition, outside practitioners are routinely brought in to interact with the students in the spring semester, and students are encouraged to attend the bi-annual meetings of the North Carolina Industrial and Organizational Psychologists (NCIOP) held at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina (and other locations). NCIOP meetings are geared to both an academic/student audience and to practitioners in the I/O field. Students at these meetings are exposed to a rich mix of faculty, students, alumni, and practitioners in both formal and informal settings.

3b. The reviewers “*recommend that the program consider creating a student chapter of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM – www.shrm.org).*”

Currently there is a Greenville chapter of SHRM (#0551; North Carolina Coastal SHRM, Vickie Williford, 252-752-8880 x 256, <http://www.nccshrm.com>) that takes student members. In addition, there is a student chapter forming at East Carolina University (fall, 2013; Sharon Justice, 252-737-4497, Justices@ecu.edu) I/O students are welcome to join both groups, and this information will be added to the syllabus for PSYC 6465 (Organizational Behavior).

4. Finally, the reviewers emphasized the for the I/O program to “*balance its commitment to both tracks without siphoning resources from either, or undervaluing the importance or qualifications of the MA students.*”

This year we have had ongoing discussions at the Departmental, College and Graduate School levels concerning funding for graduate assistantships.

As of 1/7/2013, part of the Graduate School funding for the Masters level I/O students was officially transferred into the Psychology line for PhD students. Due to the current State-wide funding emergency, this is in keeping with the internal policies of the Department for the last several years. We have been able to fund some (N=6) assistantship slots (\$9000/yr.) through the 2012-2013 academic year; continuation of master’s funding depends on the continuing support available to graduate programs. An important topic of focus this year has been identifying support for the three incoming students for the Occupational Health Psychology (OHP) PhD concentration. Funds from outside the Department of Psychology, HCAS, and the Graduate School were secured to support the initial three students for this new doctoral concentration. Therefore, the launching of this doctoral concentration will not take further funding from the I/O MA Program.

Resources Needed: Continuing funding for MA students at the current level is needed to maintain the high quality of applicants to the program. In order to not divert funding from the MA program, if additional funds cannot be secured for a 2013-2014 OHP doctoral class, no class will be admitted for that year.

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