DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

PSYCHOLOGY UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM
School of Arts and Sciences

Periodic Program Review
Self-Study

2018-2019

I. Executive summary

The Psychology undergraduate program is robust even in an academic environment marked by declining enrollment in liberal arts majors and a geographic environment marked by unfavorable demographic trends. Its emphasis on attainment of excellence through learning and engagement meshes with the College's strategic plan and sets students up for success in the workplace, in future educational endeavors, and in the community. Program faculty are invested in student learning outcome assessment, increasing their focus on summative assessment and exploring pedagogical refinements based on assessment results. There are, however, areas of some concern, the most notable of which center on factors (e.g., dwindling support resources; students who need increasing support) that could hinder our ability to succeed in our program mission. The self-study reveals a few potential action items, such as reviewing the current curriculum, assuring that the right mix of faculty are available for content delivery, taking steps to improve the program's support structure, and continuing to modify our assessment regime.

Program Curriculum
The undergraduate major requires, at a minimum, 13 courses in psychology (nominally 40 credits) covering core/research, breadth, application, elective, and capstone topics. This curriculum went into effect right around the time of our past PPR (2012) and its requirements have not been altered since. (A combined BS/MA program has been launched in the interim, but it follows the department's standard undergraduate and graduate curricula.) Several slight changes are being pursued at present (e.g., instituting a minimum grade requirement in certain courses) and others might merit consideration (e.g., creating a program-level distinction between BS and BA curricula). The addition of some niche courses, forays into online instruction, and the creation of a program-based internship experience are the most noteworthy developments since the last PPR. Besides the internship, other opportunities for high-impact, engagement experiences are available including some that are credit-bearing (e.g., assisting faculty members with research; accompanying faculty on study abroad excursions) and some that are not (e.g., participation in student organizations such as Psychology Club). Just as our present curriculum took its cue from American Psychological Association recommendations, tomorrow's can be informed by APA's current guidelines, which, by emphasizing not just the usual knowledge base and scientific inquiry and critical thinking but also development of a sense of ethical, responsible professionalism in a diverse world, we consider to be timely and welcome.

Faculty
The program is run by 14 full-time, tenure-track faculty (3 assistant professors, 10 associate professors, 1 professor), one full-time lecturer, and usually 4-6 adjunct instructors (several of whom have been with us consistently for many years; while we are most grateful for their efforts, we are also pleased that program delivery does not over-rely on adjuncts). A just-hired social psychologist will bring some new interests, including cross-cultural research, in Fall 2019. At the same time, the upcoming departure of one of our clinical faculty will create a gap in this area that probably cannot be adequately filled by the eventual return of the Chair (a clinician) to a regular teaching load. In terms of specialty areas, the faculty possess a mix of experimental, clinical, and non-clinical applied foci, and their knowledge and experience are well-suited to delivering a broad-based undergraduate program that also highlights a number of niche interests. Several faculty have received awards for teaching, advising, and/or mentoring students. Nearly all maintain active and productive research programs with plentiful opportunities for student assistance — indeed, supervising student research assistants is one of the most important and esteemed activities in which our faculty engage. And, with inevitable but fortunately rare exceptions, the faculty are collegial, mutually supportive, and committed more to program interests than to self-interests. Strong though their contributions are, the faculty increasingly find themselves stretched and sapped by ever-increasing service obligations, many of which have become so normalized over the years that it is easy to forget that they are add-ons. One example is the growing expectation that program faculty and staff track information on (and maintain interaction with) its alumni, which is

hard enough in a small, intimate program with few students but rather overwhelming in a program that graduates well over 100 students a year, many of whom were essentially anonymous when they were here.

Students
The program hosts the most majors and minors in the School of Arts and Sciences (close to 700, yielding one of the most persistently unfavorable student:faculty ratios for any department on campus). While it has not seen significant growth over the past 5 years, the program has resisted the widespread enrollment declines characteristic of liberal arts majors in the 21st century. The most worrisome trend on the horizon is the regional population decline — and with it fewer prospective admits (at least of the caliber we have lately grown accustomed to, which is itself somewhat lower than we enjoyed 15-20 years ago). Students in the program are almost evenly split between natives and transfers (the former leading by about a 6:5 ratio). By dint of sheer numbers, we regularly boast some of the most impressive students on campus, but we also suffer too many others who are unready for college-level work; our concerns, then, lie more with their abilities than their numbers; given the aforementioned demographic trend, though, enjoying a consistently large student census not plagued by too many underperformers might be unrealistic. In light of this, we need to think about ways to assure that we can achieve our learning outcomes with the students we (will) have. The key need not lie simply in additional faculty to carry the load. For example, the support structure of the program could be improved. Although the departmental budget for supplies and equipment remains adequate, this year saw a 20% reduction in work-study funding for the department as well as the elimination of 1 of its 2 remaining Graduate Assistant positions – the department having held 3 assistantships just a couple years ago. It should also be remembered that, without any appreciable change in faculty or student numbers, the department operates presently with 1 full-time secretary, which is a decrease from 1.5 secretarial positions some 15 years ago, and the erosion of these kinds of supports hurts the program. More frustrating than the loss of work-study help, even more than the loss of GA lines, is the chronic inadequacy of Information Technology support; IT is *sine qua non* of a contemporary academic department, and a program's ability to achieve its mission and goals is diminished to the extent that IT support is lacking. Finally, the program's physical infrastructure is problematic; although the quantity of space is for the most part excellent, the quality of that space is subpar for both faculty and students and it threatens to compromise the ability of both groups to find maximal success here.

Assessment
During the period under review, the Department of Psychology revised its program student learning outcomes and assessment procedures. The revised outcomes describe the skills and knowledge that students should have after completing the program and were based on the American Psychological Association's recommended outcomes for psychology programs. The department sampled thousands of students from dozens of classes at all levels of the psychology curriculum. The procedure for assessing those student learning outcomes used multiple measurements, including: (1) rubric-based scoring of senior-level, written assignments (2) a multiple-choice-based exit exam, and (3) multiple-choice questions included in unit exams in required courses. Multiple outcomes were assessed twice during the review period, including outcomes related to ethics and content area knowledge. Assessments revealed weaknesses in specific components of critical thinking and written communication. In addition, improvement in student knowledge related to select content areas (e.g., biopsychology) has been difficult to achieve and detect. In response to assessment results, instructors have implemented targeted and consistent changes in instruction across the curriculum, including: additional laboratory exercises and demonstrations in PSH 301 (Research Methods) and PSH 110 (Principles of Psychology), new teaching instruments (e.g., video modules) in content area courses, and new lecture strategies. Thus, during the review period, the department overhauled its assessment procedures. Nevertheless, work remains. Almost all program student learning outcomes were assessed at the summative level during the period under review. However, the research methods outcome was assessed using only in-class, multiple choice items. The assessment coordinator has begun discussing the development of a common rubric for assessment of written work in PSH 301, which would be added to the multiple-choice-based assessment. Relatedly, the rubric that was used to assess the application program student learning outcome needs improvement.