

Department of Psychology Assessment Plan From the 2011 Five-Year Review

Mission Statement: The mission of the Department of Psychology at California State University, Hayward is to encourage and advance learning in the field of psychology, and encourage among its students and faculty a lifelong enthusiasm for intellectual activity, including basic research, the integration of knowledge, and the application of scholarship to practical problems. This mission is consistent with the University's mission.

Goals: The primary goals of the Department are to enable our students to:

- * Develop scientific thinking and methodological skills
- * Master the content and theory of the field of psychology
- * Apply psychology and prepare for careers.

In addition, our Department has secondary goals which further enhance the education of all students. These goals are to enable our students to:

- * Demonstrate information competence, including using current technology
- * Develop written and oral communication skills
- * Understand the complexities of cultural diversity
- * Enhance personal development.

These primary and secondary goals are consistent with our Mission Statement and with goals outlined in 1999 by 48 CSU psychology faculty representing 19 CSU campuses.

This document presents: first, the Department's approaches to achieving our goals; second, the performance indicators we currently use to assess those goals and the perceived learning outcomes; and third, our future plans.

Current Approaches to Achieving Our Goals

Goal 1: Developing Scientific Thinking and Methodological Skills

The definitive feature of scientific thinking is the requirement to base conclusions on carefully collected data, rather than common sense, deeply felt beliefs, authoritative sources, cultural wisdom, laws, or other sources of knowledge. Learning this habit of thought is one important path to thinking clearly.

Methodological skills in psychology include a variety of research and practice techniques. All of these techniques make use of scientific thinking and of skills in data collection, measurement, and data analysis, but they vary considerably in detail.

Research psychologists tend to specialize around their methods, rather than around content domains. For example, some methodological specialties include measuring nervous system activity directly, collecting reaction-time measures with computers, observing natural behavior in the field, collecting survey information, setting up artificial situations in laboratory settings and carefully measuring responses, and so forth.

Practicing psychologists also tend to specialize around their methods. Some methodological techniques useful in practice include testing and assessment, clinical diagnosis, program evaluation, techniques for personnel selection, job analysis, and performance appraisal.

We emphasize scientific thinking in all of our courses. In content courses, the usual form of instruction is to present empirical findings and explore how they relate to various theoretical interpretations. This approach requires students to develop and hone their scientific thinking skills repeatedly. Research and practice techniques commonly used in each content area are also described in content courses. With repeated exposure, students gradually become familiar with the various methodological approaches.

In addition to content courses, four required courses are devoted specifically to scientific thinking and methodological skills. All psychology majors must complete Methods of Investigation in Psychology and

Experimental Psychology, plus two courses in Statistics. Students in the B.A. program and in the Industrial Option of the B.S. program must also take at least one course in testing/evaluation/assessment. Students in the Industrial Option also take additional courses that provide specific training in program evaluation, techniques for personnel selection, job analysis, and performance appraisal. Those in the Human Factors Option of the B.S. program also take eight additional courses in math, physics, and statistics, plus two additional courses from a group of courses in psychology, math, computer science, and statistics.

These demanding courses prepare our majors for rigorous laboratory-based classes during their final year at CSUH. Students in the B.A. program and in the Industrial Option of the B.S. program must complete two of these research lab courses; those in the Ergonomics and Human Factors Option of the B.S. program must complete one lab course plus an approved internship. Students in all programs choose from among eight different advanced labs, each emphasizing research methodology from different content areas (e.g., learning and cognition, motivation, social and personality, and developmental). Each lab requires that students complete empirical research projects and write integrative papers based on these projects. In addition to developing scientific thinking, these projects encourage the development of written, quantitative, information literacy, and computer literacy skills.

We offer content courses in Abnormal Psychology, Introduction to Psychotherapy, and Child Psychopathology.

Goal 2: Mastering the Content and Theory in Psychology

Core Content

Since its beginnings in the late 1800s, the field of psychology has shown a pattern of dynamic growth and frequent redefinition. Identifying the core content of psychology and coming to agreement on what constitutes that core is a process under constant discussion. As the field of psychology changes and matures, so does our curriculum.

Psychologists view our content from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. For example, some physiological psychologists using one set of methodological approaches focus on studying how the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system give rise to various perceptual or emotional phenomena. However, perception and emotion are also studied by other psychologists using very different approaches. Some developmental psychologists focus on how and why various aspects of perception differ at different points in the lifespan. Some social psychologists investigate how certain aspects of emotion are affected when people interact in groups, or how they are affected by the expectations of others. Other psychologists look at the same topics from other perspectives. Differences in perspective and methodology lead to different theories. The resulting methodological and theoretical cross-cutting makes it difficult for the field of psychology to agree on how to define and separate our core content areas. Our Department is no different from our field in this respect.

Our Department views psychology as having three core content areas and the structure of our curriculum reflects this:

- * The study of human and animal learning and behavior
- * The study of the more-or-less conscious functioning of the human mind, including perception, memory, attention, problem solving, decision making, and the use of language
- * The study of the social and emotional behavior and feelings of human beings, and how these relate to the construct that we call personality.

All of this content is relevant to more applied content areas such as abnormal psychology and stress and coping.

To insure that our students become familiar with this content, students in all of our degree programs are required to achieve passing grades in a series of courses that require them to master portions of this core knowledge.

Students in all of our degree programs are required to take one course in human and animal learning and behavior. Content from the other two core areas is provided in different ways for the different degree programs.

B.A. students are required to sample one course from each of the following two groupings:

Cognitive Psychology, Sensation and Perception, Psycholinguistics, all of which provide at least some content

relevant to the more-or-less conscious functioning of the human mind; Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, or Psychology of Personality, all of which provide at least some content in the study of the social and emotional behavior and feelings of human beings. In addition, B.A. students are required to take at least one course in Physiological Psychology, which insures additional coverage of the core content from that methodological perspective. B.A. students are also required to take a Biology course (with lab) plus three additional upper-division psychology electives, almost all of which provide even more coverage of the core content.

B.S. students with an Option in Industrial Psychology are required to take courses in Cognitive Psychology, Industrial Psychology, and Human Factors, all of which provide content relevant to aspects of the functioning of the human mind as this relates to an industrial or business setting. They must also take three courses that are focused on organizational behavior and three that are focused on assessment and performance appraisal. In addition, they must take three additional upper-division psychology electives to provide more coverage of core content.

B.S. students with an Option in Human Factors are required to take courses in Human Factors, Sensation and Perception, and either Cognitive Psychology or Psycholinguistics, all of which provide content relevant to aspects of the functioning of the human mind; plus a course in social behavior and one in Physiological Psychology.

Theories

All content courses include theoretical content relevant to those approaches. In addition, B.A. students are required to select one course from among three theoretical survey courses. For the B.S. students with an Option in Industrial Psychology, the Industrial Psychology course serves as a capstone course, tying together many theoretical threads. For the B.S. students with an Option in Human Factors, the Human Factors course serves the same purpose.

Goal 3: Applying Psychology and Preparing for Careers

The undergraduate degree in psychology is normally considered direct career preparation only insofar as it prepares students for graduate study in psychology. Our heavy emphasis on methodology, along with our required coverage of the core areas, is designed specifically to prepare students for graduate study.

Students planning to pursue graduate study also need role models and research experience. To be good role models, members of our faculty are encouraged to be active professionals. Our Department strives to support the research and other professional endeavors of our faculty, especially insofar as they provide our students with valuable learning experiences. We provide space and other resources to make research possible. Students in our advanced labs perform original research, sometimes of their own design, sometimes designed by the professor. Students who are especially interested often go further than required, and work directly with professors on extended research projects—sometimes leading to publications.

With respect to preparation for careers after graduation with a B.A. degree, our primary emphasis is on helping students identify knowledge garnered from coursework that can be applied to potential jobs and careers.

Our B.S. programs are more closely targeted toward bachelor-level careers, although we have made sure that they provide adequate preparation for graduate school as well. Again, our primary emphasis is on helping students recognize the relation between coursework and career. A series of small courses designed to assist Industrial/Organizational Option students with their career plans is in place. In addition, the B.S. programs include courses that are more directly career applicable.

In addition to academic instruction, tenure-track faculty provide career advising to students. The department also provides an on-line Student Handbook which includes some career information, publishes a quarterly newsletter which frequently focuses on career planning, and supports two student organizations which offer events designed to assist with career planning.

Secondary Goals

Most content courses include elements designed to achieve one or more of our secondary goals. For example, many instructors require written assignments, oral presentations, and assignments that require students to develop their

information competence. In addition, successful performance in our mandatory lab courses requires information competence, including using current technology, plus good written and oral communication skills.

By emphasizing how the environment shapes individuals, virtually all courses in Psychology at least indirectly address the goal of enabling our students to understand the complexities of cultural diversity. However, some courses do so very directly. For example, Developmental Psychology emphasizes how cultural differences impact individuals throughout their lives, and provides experiences that require students to investigate the development of people in cultures other than their own. Similarly, by their nature, virtually all courses in Psychology address the goal of enhancing personal development. Another new course, The Impact of Culture on Social Psychology, deals even more directly with these issues.

Performance Indicators and Learning Outcomes^a

Goal 1: Developing Scientific Thinking and Methodological Skills

- * Recognize, identify, and formulate a research hypothesis
- * Identify and formulate properties of a sound research design
 - o Independent and dependent variables
 - o Characteristics of and distinctions among empirical approaches to studying behavior
 - o Research design (e.g., single vs. multi-subject)
- * Conduct a suitable literature search
- * Identify and apply appropriate data collection methods
 - o Select appropriate research materials
 - o Formulate appropriate instructions
 - o Follow A.P.A. ethical guidelines
 - o Pretest and review design
 - o Identify and derive reliable and valid measures of behavior
- * Identify and apply appropriate procedures for analyzing collected data
 - o Summary graphs and tables
 - o Appropriate statistical tools for the analysis of data
- * Draw appropriate conclusions from collected data
- * Communicate orally and in writing about the research.

Goal 2: Mastering the Content and Theory in Psychology

- * Describe the nature of psychology as a discipline
- * Use the concepts, language, and major theories of the discipline to account for psychological phenomena
- * Explain major perspectives of psychology (e.g., behavioral, biological, cognitive, evolutionary, humanistic, psychodynamic, and sociocultural)
- * Demonstrate knowledge and understanding representing appropriate breadth and depth in selected content areas of psychology.

Goal 3: Applying Psychology and Preparing for Careers

- * Describe major applied areas of psychology (e.g., clinical, counseling, industrial/organizational, school, health)
- * Identify appropriate applications of psychology in solving problems (e.g., pursuing healthy lifestyles, psychological tests and measurements, psychology-based interventions and their empirical evaluation)
- * Articulate how psychological principles can be used to explain social issues and inform public policy
- * Apply psychological concepts, theories, and research findings as these relate to everyday life
- * Recognize that ethically complex situations can develop in the application of psychological principles.

^aStudent learning outcomes based upon recommendations of the American Psychological Association in their “National Guidelines and Suggested Learning Outcomes for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (Draft #10).”

Four Assessment Tools

We have developed a four-pronged approach to assessment; a Pre-Post Test, an Alumni Survey, a Senior Survey, and a Faculty Self-Assessment. These four assessments provide independent but converging sources of evidence upon which to evaluate our performance and institute change where indicated (see assessment flow chart below).

Psychology Department Assessment Flow Chart

