

**Academic Program and Curriculum Committee  
Review of the Undergraduate Program in Psychology**

Review Team:

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## **Introduction**

An ad hoc review team was assembled in December 2013 to conduct an internal review of the undergraduate program in Psychology spanning the 7-year period beginning with Academic Year 2006-2007. The review was conducted in Spring 2014 following the guidelines set forth in the APCC document "Audit and Review Procedures" revised in 2013. The information is based on data compiled from 1) the self-study prepared by the Department of Psychology in Fall 2013, 2) additional information provided by the department at the request of the review team, and 3) from the College of Letters and Sciences Course Registration History. In addition, the team met with program administrators, faculty, students, and alumni on April 9, 2014 to learn their perceptions of the program's performance, tour the classroom and laboratory facilities, and to ask questions regarding recently enacted changes to the undergraduate program. On April 16, 2014 the team also met with two additional members of the Department of Psychology currently serving as Dean of the College of Letters and Science and Associate Dean for Social Sciences. The team gratefully acknowledges the time and cooperation extended by the administration, faculty, students, and alumni of the Department of Psychology who provided insights and clarifications that were vital to the review process.

## **I. General Data**

The Department of Psychology offers a single undergraduate major in Psychology within which student may choose an emphasis in one of four informal tracks: behavioral analysis, clinical psychology, health psychology, and neuroscience. Students may also opt to minor in Psychology. The Psychology major is popular among undergraduate students, with 5% of all recent UWM B.A. degrees awarded to majors in psychology. During the course of this review the department was also approved to offer the option of a B.S. degree. The B.S. option has been added specifically for students interested in ultimately pursuing advanced degrees in neuroscience. In addition to the "in person" major or minor, at the request of the College, the department has also aggressively implemented online offerings for most of their courses allowing students to complete the major or minor in a fully online setting.

## **II. Faculty**

The faculty and staff are very well qualified and engaged in important scholarly activities as evidenced by the record of research presentations, publications, and research funding. The department has twenty-six full time faculty members, all holding Ph.D. degrees. The department also had one full time one PhD-level senior lecturer with a 4/4 teaching load, and was in the process of hiring a second senior lecturer position also with a 4/4 teaching load. There is a fairly even distribution of faculty among the ranks (8 Full, 10 Associates, 8 Assistants), and across sub-disciplines. However, a reduction in the number of clinically focused faculty since the last review is cause for concern given the substantial student interest in clinical psychology. At the time of the site visit, the department had also been approved to recruit a new faculty member to replace a departing clinical faculty member. However, the faculty stressed a continued need for additional instructional staff to teach general psychology courses either face-to-face or online, and for clinically focused faculty.

At the last review, conducted in 2001, faculty urged additional hires to reduce reliance on graduate students as instructors. Since the last review the number of faculty has grown by 52% while the number of majors/intended majors increased 24%, however there remains a substantial reliance on graduate student lecturers. While most faculty are involved in undergraduate teaching, 40% of the faculty teach only in upper level courses (400 level or above). Seven of the ten new hires have arrived within the last three years and are on reduced teaching loads while they set up their new labs. Some of these faculty members also have extramural funding that restricts the amount of teaching they do. The department indicated that it was expected that the new hires would eventually receive extramural

funding that would allow them to buy out of their teaching. Thus, it is expected that the new hires will not be contributing significantly more to delivering the undergraduate curriculum than they are at this time. In addition, the department has added additional online sections of all core classes to permit students to complete the major online, which further stretches its limited resources.

While the growth in research-focused faculty provides substantial research opportunities for undergraduate students and is a distinct strength of the program, the ability to deliver the core undergraduate curriculum remains severely stressed. Graduate students and instructional staff teach many of the lower-level undergraduate psychology courses. According to the self-study report, 50% of the burden of teaching large-enrollment, lower-level courses is borne by graduate student lecturers. Although graduate students must have completed a thesis masters degree to qualify as lecturers, they often have little prior teaching experience, and no faculty oversight. Teaching such classes is a substantial burden for graduate students to bear, and such course offerings may also do undergraduate students a disservice. In addition, these large lecture classes no longer have associated discussion sections. The inability to offer the discussion sections was attributed to a TA-shortage created by the increase in the number of graduate students supported on RAs. Thus there is a need for a focused strategy for future hires in order to meet the competing needs of the “in person” and “online” undergraduate programs and the graduate program. In addition to hiring academic staff, the faculty are encouraged to think about how all of their courses can be offered in light of the university’s overall budget shortfalls that may make it difficult to hire additional staff in the near and long term.

### **III. Students**

In reviewing the course enrollment history the review team was satisfied that “there are adequate numbers of qualified students for meaningful cohorts to meet learning objectives” as stipulated by the Audit guidelines. The number of majors averaged 277 over the 7-year period. Although the number of majors peaked between 2009-2011, the number of majors returned to 2006-2008 levels over the last two years, mirroring overall enrollment trends at the University. Likewise, enrollments in most of the 29 courses that were regularly offered during the review period remained steady (22/29) or increased (7/29). A trend of increasing enrollments over the review period were noted in 3 lower division courses (Psychological Statistics, Introduction to Conditioning and Learning, and Child Psychology) and 4 upper division courses (Psychotropic Drugs and Behavior, Perception, Advanced Physiological Psychology, and Experimental Child Psychology), which is also reflected in the growth of student credit hours conveyed.

The review team also had the opportunity to meet with five current majors in the program (junior and seniors), as well as six alumni who had graduated within the past 5 years. Five of the six alumni were either employed in or pursuing graduate work in a psychology-related field, and all were pleased with their preparation for the post-undergraduate careers. One area that the students and alumni felt could be improved upon was guidance in professional development. Most stated that they were not clear about career options or how to pursue them. However, all students agreed that a clear strength of the program was that it stressed proficiency in scientific methods and statistics. They cited the Research Methods course (Psych 325) as being particularly critical in the development of their writing and critical thinking skills. Alumni of the program felt that proficiencies in these skills set them apart and from other candidates when interviewing for jobs and graduate programs. In addition, all students who had participated in independent study research opportunities found these experiences to be an extremely important and valuable part of their education, and recommended that such opportunities be more broadly advertised to incoming students. Overall, the students and alumni we met with spoke enthusiastically about the program and were pleased with their educational experiences.

#### **IV. Curriculum**

The undergraduate program in psychology has a pre-professional character, preparing students for graduate study in psychology and related fields. A central strength of the undergraduate program has been its training in research methodology and laboratory practice. Alumni who met with the review team, all of whom were fairly recent graduates, reported that the program had prepared them well for graduate study and research careers, and stated that the key factors of the curriculum for their success were: (1) training in statistics in Psych 210; (2) training in methods and professional writing in Psych 325; and (3) the research skills gleaned through the two advanced laboratory courses they were required to take. Weaknesses of the curriculum, reported by alumni, were the reliance on “Scantron” examinations rather than writing in almost all substantive classes, dissatisfaction with online laboratory coursework, a lack of exposure to practical professional training outside of the labs, and a lack of guidance on career possibilities for those who did not go on to graduate training.

During the time this review was in process, the Department had three substantial changes to curricular requirements approved by the L&S APCC. In the past, students were required to take Psych 101 and Psych 210 (Statistics) and to have a cumulative GPA of 2.67 in these classes before declaring the major. With the laudable intent of encouraging students to sign up for the major earlier in the college career so that they could receive more mentoring, the Department dropped the requirement that students take Psych 210 prior to declaring the major. However, the Department has not considered another potential impact of this decision: many students find statistics challenging, and those who are mathematically underprepared were previously screened out by the requirement. It is now possible that majors, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds, could face serious challenges completing the program, due to an inability to pass statistics.

The second substantial curricular change was that the Department dropped the requirement that minors take Psych 325 (Research Methods). This change was made with the aim of reducing enrollment pressure on this class, which causes a “bottleneck” to degree completion, as students must take it before enrolling in advanced laboratory classes. However, research methodology is at the core of the program, and is the key skill alumni cite as being of use to them in their careers. Alumni also stated that important writing skills were gained in this class. Other social science departments do require minors to take a research methods class.

The third curricular change made was to reduce the advanced laboratory requirement for majors from two laboratory courses to one. The reason given was a lack of sufficient faculty to teach these courses. We note that a much smaller faculty pool was able to staff these courses at the last Review, and that alumni of the undergraduate program stated that taking two such courses was extremely valuable to them. Several alumni noted that they signed up first for a lab in an area with which they were familiar, but that it was their second lab course, in an area they knew little about before signing up, that opened up a new possible career trajectory for them, about which they were very enthusiastic.

In addition to these changes in curricular requirements for the major and minor, the department was also approved to offer a B.S. option for the Psychology major. It was communicated to us by the faculty that this change was implemented mainly for students interested focusing their studies in neuroscience. In order to meet the minimum number of advanced Natural Science credits required for a B.S. degree, a number of courses that were previously listed to fulfill the L&S breadth requirement for social science are now designated to satisfy the L&S advance natural science requirement instead. Since the impetus for implementing the B.S. option was out of concern for students interested in neuroscience, and a foundation in biology, chemistry, and physics is critical to the study of neuroscience, it is of concern that these courses are not required for the B.S. degree.

Overall the students and alumni we met with agreed that the major met most of the curricular objectives stated in its mission. Students felt confident that they knew the requirements and could receive assistance from their advisor in a timely manner when they had questions. There were a few areas that are stated as core areas of knowledge for the major that the students were not familiar with including Language, Individual Differences, Human Development, Psychological Assessment and Intervention, and Multicultural Psychology. With regard to Multicultural Psychology, it was noted in the self-study that a review of the diversity content within the current offerings had been completed. However, the recommendations from the report have not yet been disseminated or acted upon since the faculty member assigned to this task is currently on sabbatical.

## **V. Resources**

At the time of the last report, central concerns were raised by the review team regarding the insufficiency of resources available to support undergraduate education in the Department of Psychology, in terms of the supplies and equipment budget, instructional laboratory support, and space requirements. The resource deficiency for the undergraduate program has gotten worse since that time. The S&E budget is grossly inadequate to meet program needs. Over the past decade, Departmental S&E increased by approximately \$10,000, while phone and photocopy expenses alone increased by approximately \$35,000. There are no S&E funds available for such important undergraduate training purposes as support for student research expenses, student travel to present at conferences, students awards, or informational events about the psychology program.

In addition to the need for increased S&E funding, the physical infrastructure with regard to undergraduate instruction is in dire need of modernization. Instructional laboratories utilized by undergraduates need extensive renovation and updating of outmoded equipment. Classrooms in Garland Hall used by the Department for undergraduate discussion sections and small classes are poorly lit, windowless, and dingy. While the Department has acquired substantial renovated space in Garland Hall, the increase was needed to accommodate the laboratory research needs of the faculty, which has increased substantially in number since the last program review. Therefore, there remains a need for updated instructional space for the undergraduate program.

## **VI. Evaluation**

Undergraduate education in psychology has been negatively impacted by a lack of resources devoted to supporting a regular program of internal reviews of undergraduate training. There is currently no process defined and a limited amount of data gathered for the evaluation and assessment of the program as a whole, and for evaluating the impact of recent changes to the program moving forward. The faculty is aware of the need for program assessment, but stated that ever-increasing responsibilities left them insufficient time to engage in annual undergraduate program reviews. The need for administrative assistance for the program is outlined below.

## **VII. Summary and Recommendations**

In summary, the Undergraduate Program in Psychology is a thriving program that serves a large number of students and excels at providing valuable research experiences for undergraduate students. However, the competing needs of the online, and in-person undergraduate programs as well as the graduate program, without a concomitant increase in resources is stressing the program. The following are recommendations for maintaining the strengths and further improving the program in each of the major review categories.

### Faculty

Given the substantial student interest in clinical psychology and the decrease in number of faculty in this area due to retirements and attrition, an increase in the number of clinically focused faculty is required. It is the understanding of the review team that the administration recognizes this need and has already approved the recruitment of one new faculty member in clinical psychology to replace a recent retirement, as well an additional academic staff hire. However, there remains a need for additional faculty in this area.

The current reliance on graduate student lecturers with little prior teaching experience for large enrollment course is suboptimal for both undergraduate and graduate students. The review team offers the following suggestions to remedy the situation:

- The faculty is encouraged to provide more training and supervision of graduate student lecturers. Students could be encouraged/required to take a 1-credit course, currently offered by Educational Psychology, for TAs on how to teach psychology to undergraduate students.
- Ultimately, the program is encouraged to develop a long-term strategy for more consistent staffing of the lower level foundational courses.
  - The faculty is encouraged to balance their teaching loads with lower-level and upper-level courses to reduce reliance on graduate students to teach large enrollment courses.
  - Hiring of academic staff rather than relying on graduate students to teach mass lectures would be preferable. However, by clearly identifying the teaching needs (see below), requests for instructional academic staff can be clearer and more targeted.
  - The program is encouraged to map out its ability to deliver all of the courses across all areas (behavioral analysis, clinical psychology, health psychology, and neuroscience) within the current faculty load (i.e., 2-2). Then, identify the instructional needs in consideration of buy-outs, load reductions for new faculty, etc.

### Students

Given the size of the program, a dedicated administrative staff person who can work with the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies to coordinate the undergraduate psychology program is required in order to ensure that the program is consistently delivered in a high-quality manner and reviewed regularly to assess program outcomes.

### Curriculum

The faculty is encouraged to consider the impacts of recently enacted changes to the program that may undermine its strengths and the emphasis of research training in the program. These include:

- Eliminating the requirement for Psych 210 (Statistics), which was previously a gating step, before declaration of the major. Additional tutoring/mentoring may be necessary to help declared majors successfully complete this course given that a large proportion of students entering UWM are deficient in basic math skills.
- Dropping the Psych 325 (Research Methods) course requirement for minors. Given the importance of research to the program, it seems reasonable to expect minors to have proficiency in research methods. This cut was made to overcome a “bottleneck” for majors. The review team recommends that the program consider adding instructors to create more sections.

- Reduction in advanced laboratory course requirement from two to one. This was considered a strength of the program, which previously set it apart from other programs. This cut was made to overcome a “bottleneck” for majors. The review team recommends that the program consider adding instructors to create more sections.

A requirement for foundational courses in chemistry, biology, and physics should be considered for students graduating with a B.S. in Psychology. The rationale for creating the B.S. option was for students pursuing interests in neuroscience. A strong foundation in the basic natural sciences is necessary for pursuing graduate studies in neuroscience.

Since most exams are given in “Scantron” format, incorporating more writing activities or including a technical writing course in the curriculum seems necessary to develop students’ writing skills.

The faculty is encouraged to revisit the internal study assessing multi-cultural knowledge and beliefs to identify gaps that can be addressed to improve the delivery of multicultural psychology content to students.

Review the quality of the online laboratory instruction. Faculty are encouraged to review pedagogical practices for online labs to ensure that they are delivered in a manner that meets the objectives of the course in the same manner as the face-to-face version.

### Resources

The faculty is encouraged to apply for State lab modernization funds to update laboratory facilities for undergraduate courses.

Instructional lab and classroom needs as well as the department’s need for additional space could be met by moving to larger quarters in the NWQ, with new labs built, since this is cheaper than renovation.

An increase in S&E funding, which has not increased commensurate to the significant increases in basic costs for phone and copies alone, is required to:

- help support undergraduate research, which is a strength of the program.
- provide academic awards for students.
- provide awards for students to travel and present at research conferences.
- provide opportunities for post-undergraduate career planning (e.g., guest speakers from different disciplines, handouts, connection with career center, etc.), which has been identified as a weakness of the program.

### Evaluation

The assessment plan that was included in the program self-study was not adequate to assess the quality of the program or the outcomes.

- The faculty is encouraged to revisit their assessment plan to include more existing data (e.g., course grades, time to completion, number of times students retake important courses, graduation and attrition rates, post undergraduate placements, etc.). This will be particularly important to evaluate the impact of the recent changes enacted with regard to requirements for the major and minor outlined above.
- In addition to systematically collecting and analyzing assessment data to make program decisions, the faculty is encouraged to develop new measures (e.g., supervisor evaluation ratings for labs and fieldwork, creation of a capstone requirement such as portfolio, etc.). These data can be consistent with the data needed for WEAVE. The faculty may also consider exit surveys to get the students’ perspective on their training experience.