

School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Psychology

Undergraduate Program Review

Resubmitted to the Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC)
Undergraduate Curriculum Forum

March 11, 2009

Report prepared by Patricia Kahlbaugh in consultation with the
Psychology Department Faculty

Standard 1. The department/program's mission supports the university's mission.

The university's mission states that Southern Connecticut State University is a comprehensive institution of higher education, which is intentionally diverse and committed to "academic excellence, access, social justice, and service for the public good (University Strategic Plan for 2007-2012, p. 15). The institution's core values are excellence, access, diversity, student success, life-long learning and community involvement.

The mission of the Psychology Department is to provide students with a comprehensive education in psychology. Consistent with the aims of a liberal arts education, our mission is to prepare students for the pursuit of life-long inquiry and flexible adaptation to a changing world in their chosen careers. As a result of their educational experiences in the Psychology Department, students will have extensive knowledge in and appreciation for a) the scientific bases of psychology, and b) the applications of psychology to real settings, and will be able to write and think critically in the discipline. The Psychology Department endeavors to accomplish this mission by supporting three undergraduate areas of study, each of which provides exposure to knowledge in scientific foundations and applications within the discipline. The General program and the Mental Health program offer a BA, while the Research program offers a BS. All three programs share an emphasis on core topics of study, applications, writing and critical thinking. The BS broadens this view with more emphasis on the application of psychology to industry and research fields.

The psychology department's mission supports the university's mission in its commitment to academic excellence, access, social justice and service for the public good.

Excellence: The Psychology department faculty is committed to provide excellent and rigorous instruction in subject knowledge, theoretical frameworks and modes of inquiry. Our majors (approximately 770) must maintain at least a 2.5 overall GPA for graduation. The average GPA of a psychology major at graduation is 3.08, and 86% of our students graduate in 5 or fewer years. All majors must take a capstone course, which involves research design and analysis. This course is taken in the student's junior or senior year and can lead to other research experiences or internships.

Access: As noted above, the department has selection criteria that effectively limits access to the major; however, we accomplish access in a number of other ways. First we provide access through our ability to offer a large number of sections across an extensive range of courses (over 100 sections of courses each semester reaching approximately 3500 students every semester). Our ability to offer an extensive program of courses provides students, psychology majors and students outside the major, access to a broad and deep education in this field. We also conceptualize access as access to the faculty. The department has created a culture that values student-faculty interaction and collaboration.

Social justice: The psychology department is committed to imparting to our students an understanding and tolerance for all people. We are committed to a mindset of

social equality and social justice, and this mindset is modeled, nurtured and encouraged in students through our curriculum. Further, the resources of our department are equitably distributed to the students at SCSU. A core value is that all students be encouraged to reach their own greatest potential through advisement, tutorials, and mentorship.

Service for the public good: When our majors graduate from Southern with a degree in psychology, it is the psychology department's goal that they return to their communities with a curiosity and clarity of thinking, a greater knowledge of themselves, of others, and of social relationships, and a greater sensitivity to and understanding of our diverse world. The faculty is committed to working with students to stimulate their interest in learning, to sharpen their intellect and to create in them awareness of themselves and of their feelings, thoughts, behaviors and relationships.

In summary, the psychology department supports the university's mission in its commitment to academic excellence, access, social justice and service for the public good. The department is student centered and desires to instill in students a curiosity and passion for learning. We provide a foundation for further professional development in psychology or other related fields of study.

Standard 2. The department/program has clearly stated program goals and objectives

Program Goal 1: Both the BA and BS programs in the psychology department provide learning opportunities so that students can gain knowledge about the *science of psychology*.

Program Goal 2: Both the BA and BS programs in the psychology department provide learning opportunities so that students can gain knowledge about *applications of psychology to real problems*.

Program Goal 3: Both the BA and BS programs in the psychology department provide learning opportunities so that students can gain knowledge about *writing and thinking critically in the discipline*.

Standard 3. The department/program has clearly stated program-level expected student outcomes and methods for measurement.

Based on the program goals of the department, the learning opportunities provided to support these program goals, students in our major will learn about the science of psychology, the applications of psychology to real problems, and how to write and think critically in the discipline.

Student outcomes for competent knowledge of Program Goal 1: Science of Psychology.

Through successful completion of courses offered by the program focused on the scientific foundations of psychology (e.g., Brain and Behavior, Cognition, Learning, Perception, etc.), a course in Statistics and a course in Experimental Methods:

1. Students will demonstrate competent knowledge of the scientific bases of psychology in areas such as cognition, perception, learning, neuroscience, mental illness, social interaction and development.
2. Students will be able to use and apply basic statistical knowledge to new problems.
3. Students will be able understand and apply the scientific method as it relates to hypothesis testing, research design and scientific conclusions

Methods for measuring competent knowledge using direct and indirect methods.

Direct Method for Program Goal 1: *Science of psychology.*

An Undergraduate Proficiency Board (UPB) will be created during the Fall 2009 semester as an extension of the curriculum committee. This committee of four faculty members will be charged with reviewing a random selection of 15% of coursework across courses emphasizing the scientific foundations of psychology. Assignments reviewed will include but not be limited to: essays, projects, specific test item performance, article critiques, chapter reviews and poster presentations. This review will be a double-blind review (meaning the reviewers will be blind to the identity of both instructor and student). Grading rubrics will be established within this body and criteria for competent knowledge and abilities will be determined and reported. This review of student work will be conducted one time during each 5-year review cycle and will provide information for program improvement.

Indirect Method for Program Goal 1: *Science of psychology.*

The Psychology department's curriculum consists of courses focused on the scientific bases of psychology. The courses in the curriculum identified as specifically dedicated to imparting knowledge of the *scientific foundations of psychology* will be examined more closely to determine if course objectives and assignments identified in syllabi match the program goal with which this course is aligned. As part of a validity check, at one point midway through the 5-year review cycle, a survey will be administered to students asking them to identify courses in which learning about scientific foundations of psychology occurs (see Appendix A for survey instrument). This instrument was administered spring 2008 and has yielded interesting and confirmatory information regarding courses which teach students about *psychology as a science*. Graphic representations of this information are displayed in Appendix B.

At one point midway through the 5-year review cycle, students in will be asked at the end of the semester 1) how much they have learned about the course objectives identified in the syllabus, 2) how much they would like to learn about the topic later on in life, and 3) how much they will use this information later on in life. This 3-item survey will be in a likert response format.

Example: A random sample of 15% of coursework from Brain and Behavior will be selected and evaluated by the undergraduate proficiency board (UPB). The UPB will also examine course syllabi to determine if course objectives and assignments are in line with the program goal. Finally, those courses will be asked to administer the 3-item survey described in the previous paragraph.

Student outcomes for competent knowledge of Program Goal 2: *Applications of psychology to real problems*. Through successful completion of courses offered by the program focused on the applications of psychology to real problems (e.g., psychopathology, professions in psychology, developmental, personality, social, education, law, culture and gender, etc.):

1. Students will demonstrate competent *knowledge* of the applications of psychology to real problems in areas of normal and abnormal thoughts, feelings and behavior.
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to describe and distinguish between different helping professions in the mental health field.
3. Students will demonstrate competent knowledge of developmental issues (e.g., infants, children, adolescents, adults, elderly and related settings such as schools).
4. Students will demonstrate competent knowledge of applications of social psychology to individual's behaviors in relationships, social groups, industry, and the law.
5. Students will be able to better understand their own personalities, thoughts, feelings and behaviors and the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of others.

Methods for measuring competent knowledge using direct and indirect methods.

Direct Method for Program Goal 2: *Applications of psychology to real problems*.

As stated above, the UPB will be charged with reviewing a random selection of 15% of coursework across courses emphasizing the *applications of psychology to real problems*. Assignments reviewed will include but not be limited to: essays, projects, specific test item performance, article critiques, chapter reviews and poster presentations. Grading rubrics will be established within this body and criteria for competent knowledge will be determined and reported.

Indirect Method for Program Goal 2: *Applications of psychology to real problems*.

As stated above, at one point midway through the 5-year review cycle the survey instrument will be administered to students to confirm the courses in which learning about *applications of psychology to real problems* occurs. This instrument has yielded interesting and confirmatory information regarding courses which teach students about *applications of psychology*. Courses in the curriculum identified by faculty and confirmed by this survey as specifically dedicated to imparting knowledge of *applications of psychology* will be examined more closely to determine if course objectives and assignments identified in syllabi match the program goal with which this course is aligned.

At one point midway through the 5-year review cycle, students will be asked at the end of the semester 1) how much they have learned about the course objectives identified in the syllabus, 2) how much they would like to learn about the topic later on in life, and 3) how much they will use this information later on in life.

Example: A random selection of 15% of coursework from *Abnormal Psychology* will be randomly selected and evaluated by the UPB. The UPB will also examine course

syllabi to determine if course objectives and assignments are in line with the program goal. Finally, the 3-item survey described in the previous paragraph will be administered.

Finally, a subset of our students, approximately 40 each year, is involved in a clinical internship. This clinical internship is a requirement of the BA Mental Health Specialization. A survey is given to the site supervisors regarding the performance of our students in this internship and a report of this information is compiled every year (see Appendix C).

Student outcomes for competent knowledge of Program Goal 3: *Writing and thinking critically in the discipline.* Through successful completion of courses offered by the program focused on writing and thinking critically in the discipline (e.g., upper division courses on specialized topics in psychology, Experimental Methods, etc.), students will demonstrate competent usage of:

1. a scientific writing style, including summarizing research articles, stating research questions and hypotheses, reporting methods, data analysis and conclusions.
2. writing to critically think about information presented in research articles, summary chapters, case studies, and original texts.
3. a style of inquiry that requires evidence
3. APA style in writing.

Methods for measuring competent writing and critically thinking using direct and indirect methods.

Direct Method for Program Goal 3: *Writing and thinking critically in the discipline.*

As stated above, the UPB will be charged with reviewing a random selection of 15% of coursework across courses emphasizing writing and thinking critically in psychology. Assignments reviewed will include but not be limited to: essays, projects, specific test item performance, article critiques, chapter reviews and poster presentations. Grading rubrics will be established within this body and criteria for competent writing ability and critical thinking will be determined and reported.

Indirect Method for Program Goal 3: *Writing and thinking critically in psychology.*

As stated above, at one point midway through the 5-year review cycle the survey instrument will be administered to students to confirm the courses in which learning about writing and thinking critical in the discipline occurs. Courses in the curriculum identified by faculty and confirmed by this survey as specifically dedicated to imparting knowledge of *writing and thinking critically in psychology* will be examined more closely to determine if course objectives and assignments identified in syllabi match the program goal with which this course is aligned. Finally, the 3-item survey described in the previous paragraph will be administered.

For example, *Experimental Methods* provides opportunities to learn about writing in psychology. A random selection of 15% of coursework from this course will be evaluated by the UPB.