**MSU Departmental**

**Assessment Report, June 2016**

Academic Year: 2015-2016

Department: Psychology

Program(s): Psychology

## 1. What Was Done

Because of critical emergencies in the department, last year we suspended the final year of our 4 year assessment plan and instead focused on our research design courses and our undergraduate advising. Therefore, this year we completed the final year from the 4-year assessment plan. [I will submit our new 4-year assessment plan in tandem with this report.]

The final year of our psychology department assessment called for assessing students’ performance on learning outcomes **1**, **2**, **4**, **5**, and **10** (see Table 1 in Psychology 2011-2012: 2014-2015 undergraduate assessment plan). We also included our annual **senior survey** which assesses personal development (outcome 9), but also allows student feedback on our program.

I will describe each of these outcomes in turn.

## 2. What Data Were Collected

**Outcome 1** concerns knowledge base in Psychology. We assessed this in two critical areas (Social Psychology and Physiological Psychology) during the spring 2016 semester. These two courses correspond to 2 of the 4 core breadth areas required of all majors. Also, for Physiological Psychology, the final exam was essay-based, thus providing an assessment of written communication of conceptual knowledge.

**Outcome 2** concerns mastery of research methodology. We assessed this in Psychology majors’ senior thesis (Psyx 499) capstone course. This course allows students to demonstrate their communication skills, research methodology mastery, critical thinking, sociocultural awareness and values, and informational and technological literacy. As is custom, we administered the Lawrence University Psychology capstone assessment during senior thesis conference in which students orally defend their final projects. Questions 7-9 on the Lawrence assessment focused on research methodology (see Appendix A in Psychology 2011-2012: 2014-2015 undergraduate assessment plan).

**Outcome 4** concerns applying psychology to practical problems. We assessed this by examining the number of students taking Psyx 495 (field practicum). This course gives psychology majors direct experience in applied settings relevant to psychology. Students arrange an internship and submit progress reports summarizing their field experience while relating it to psychological principles and readings.

**Outcome 5** concerns values in psychology. Question 6 on the Lawrence assessment focuses on values and ethics (see Appendix A in Psychology 2011-2012: 2014-2015 undergraduate assessment plan). Possible scores on this question ranged from 1 (very weak) to 7 (very strong).

**Outcome 10** concerns engagement, outreach, and integration and most of this information is either reported by faculty or is available online. For students, our opportunities include Psyx 495 (field practicum) and Psyx 490 (undergraduate research). We also assessed other engagement, outreach, and integration activity by students and faculty

Our **Senior Survey** was given to students in our capstone course andasks students to rate the program on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) in terms of their satisfaction either overall (Q1), with their “regular” psychology courses (Q2), with the research and field practicum opportunities (Q3), and with academic and career advising (Q4). It also asks them their career plans and allows for open-ended opinions and suggestions concerning the strengths and weaknesses of our program. This survey has been in place for around 10 years and, prior to 2011, was our sole means of assessing our program.

## 3. What Was Learned

**Outcome 1** concerns knowledge base in Psychology. The average Social Psychology multiple-choice final exam score from Psychology majors (N = 28) was 80.2%, which consisted of 7 A’s, 10 B’s, 5 C’s, and 6 D’s. This is an even distribution and an average score above 75% indicates acceptable learning of this material. For Physiological Psychology, the average final exam score was 75.6% for Psychology Majors (N = 23) and 86.9% for non-majors (N = 42). Within Psychology majors, there were 4 A’s, 4 B’s, 10 C’s, 2 D’s, and 3 F’s and the average score is just above the acceptable criterion for learning.

**Outcome 2** concerns mastery of research methodology. Possible scores on these questions ranged from 1 (very weak) to 7 (very strong) and faculty and graduate student conference attendees filled out these assessments. We received 49 evaluations in the fall and 25 evaluations in the spring. Some students were evaluated by more than one observer, especially in the fall. Ratings of students on these 3 questions were 5.9, 6.0, and 6.1 in the fall and 5.4, 5.4, and 5.8 in the spring. Thus, in both semesters, students were rated as demonstrating above average methodology and research skills.

**Outcome 4** concerns applying psychology to practical problems. Thirty students completed this course in the fall and 33 in the spring. About 30% of these students are peer advisors in the department, mostly because they want to gain experience relevant to school counseling. Other common placements include Eagle Mount, the VOICE center, Hope House, and REACH.

**Outcome 5** concerns values in psychology. There are some strict basic research studies proposed in senior thesis for which this question is not applicable. However, we received ratings for a majority of our presentations both semesters. Students’ average values and ethics ratings were 5.9 in both the fall and spring semesters, demonstrating Thu above average scores on values and ethics. In addition to this measure, all Psychology majors must complete the CITI human research online training course as part of their Research Design and Analysis requirements.

**Outcome 10** concerns engagement, outreach, and integration. Both Psyx 495 (field practicum) and Psyx 490 (undergraduate research) were filled over capacity both semesters, indicating high participation among our majors. In addition to this, faculty routine gave public talks and interviews both locally, as well as nationally. Faculty members and students also participated in MSU activities ranging from Catapolooza to Move-in day. Finally, psychology’s honor’s society (Psi Chi) had over 20 members last year and hosted events from presentations on how to get into grad school to, bowling and ice cream socials.

Our **Senior Survey** revealed that we scored above average (average response of 3.0) on all 4 questions, with fall scores of 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, and 3.8 on satisfaction overall, for regular courses, for research and field practicum opportunities, and for advising, respectively. For spring, these respective scores were 4.0, 4.2, 4.3, and 3.2. Open-ended comments on strengths included phenomenal professors who are world class researchers but also fantastic and caring instructors, diverse range of classes, the peer-advising program, and engagement opportunities. Comments on weaknesses included wanting more “real-world” classes, problems with Traphagen hall, no industrial/organizational psychology courses, lack of real difference between our two options (Psychological Science versus Applied), over-crowded major, and advising.

## 4. How We Responded

The psychology faculty met twice in the spring to discuss both the results of assessments and how to proceed with our next assessment plan. Performance on all outcomes was deemed acceptable and no major changed were deemed necessary. For **outcome 1**, we were surprised by the discrepancy in Physiological Psychology scores between majors and non-majors. However, Dr. Babcock explained that most the non-majors are pre-med students in CBN who might already have a strong background in physiology. We have discussed several opportunities that will hopefully improve performance in all these key areas in the future. First, for **outcome 2**, we spent an entire faculty meeting discussing the possibility of reversing the order of our required Psyx 225 and Psyx 223 courses. The main advantage of this for alleviating the bottleneck is that students could take Psyx 225 simultaneously with the Psyx 223 math pre-requisite, potentially speeding graduation rates. Also, although unrelated to the bottleneck problem, another advantage is that students would have knowledge of experimental design prior to learning the statistics involved in testing that design. Of course there are also potential disadvantages and we do not yet have unanimously support for the switch in order. Hopefully we will have a definitive answer on this as early as fall 2016. Also, for **outcome 10**, we have discussed adding more engagement events. For instance, we are planning a Psychology 5K walk/run during the first two weeks of school. Finally, we are working to address many issues that came up in the **senior surveys**. First, we are renovating Trap 308, where a majority of our courses are taught, to hopefully make it more modern, accommodating, and conducive to learning. Second, we are increasingly making use of outstanding classrooms outside of traphagen. Third, L&S is combining the professional advisor position across Psychology, Sociology, and Political Science. This full-time advisor will hopefully provide our students with more knowledgeable advice for courses and careers outside of psychology itself. Finally, I am working to increase the diversity of courses offered, specifically by searching through the business college for an expert in industrial/organizational psychology, by offering a course in human factors, and by potentially offering more applied courses relevant to counseling.