**Undergraduate Program Assessment Plan <Psychology>**

2016-2020

**Psychology Department Mission**

1. To support students and faculty in the exploration, discovery, and dissemination of new knowledge in psychological science.
2. To provide a collaborative environment for faculty and students that fosters intellectual curiosity and in which research and teaching a closely integrated and highly valued.
3. To graduate students who evidence psychological literacy and thereby prepare students for advanced study in psychology or related fields and for employment. Psychological literacy includes having a critical understanding of psychological concepts, theories and methods; applying psychological principles and methods to solving personal, interpersonal, or social problems; understanding and fostering respect for diversity; and acting ethically.
4. To serve the people and the communities of Montana by sharing our psychological expertise and collaborating with others.

The Psychology department is strongly committed to enhancing students learning and fulfilling our mission. Because of this, we engage in periodic assessment of our program to measure the alignment between our students’ learning and our mission. Upon collecting each year’s assessment, we will discuss our assessment results and consider potential changes in order to improve performance in each learning outcome.

**Program Learning Outcomes.**

Specific learning outcome goals for our B.S. degree are adapted from the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (2007). The APA outlines two sets of learning goals:

**(A)** learning goals central to Psychology curricula, and **(B)** learning goals common to a Liberal Arts education that are furthered by Psychology curricula.

**Category A.**

1. Demonstrate discipline-specific knowledge identifying ways in which psychology is an empirical science, explain the goals of psychology as a field, and list and explain important aspects of psychological functioning and theories of psychological function in domains such as learning, perception, cognition, memory, social processes, development, individual differences, mental health, and the biological and genetic bases of behavior.
2. Demonstrate mastery of research methodology including relating theoretical ideas to empirical research methods, designing and critiquing experiments to test hypotheses, and explain the limitations of experiments, conducting and presenting appropriate statistical analyses using quantitative technology tools, and identifying and explaining important differences between correlational and experimental studies in psychology.
3. Demonstrate critical thinking skills in psychology including identifying the logic and flaws in existent research in the context of classroom, laboratory and field work, and using scientific methods and scientific attitude to approach problems.
4. Apply psychological science, theory, and research findings to address practical problems such as promoting health and healthy life styles, retaining and enhancing cognitive function during aging and in groups, understanding everyday cognitive and perceptual processes, explaining and reducing prejudice and social disparities, promoting equal opportunities, recognizing and using persuasive methods that alter attitudes, recognizing relations between brain and behavior, and interpreting personal adjustment and clinical problems with psychological science.
5. Demonstrate values in psychology such as objectivity in weighing evidence, using empirical evidence to support claims, outlining ways in which scientific explanations are tentative and how this is an aspect of the progression of science, identifying and explaining ethical principles in the conduct of research with humans and animals, and providing examples of human individual and cultural diversity in psychological functioning.

**Category B.**

1. Show information and technological literacy such as showing facility in literature searches using data bases such as PsycInfo, PsycArticles and PubMed, appropriately evaluating the sources and quality of the information, sharing information using technology such as webpages, electronic slide presentations, poster presentations, and appropriately using and explaining quantitative technologies such as statistical and graphics packages.
2. Demonstrate communication skills such as presenting psychological information in class presentations, class discussions, formal and informal written papers, and in field work including theories and their testable implications, research goals and rationales, empirical findings, quantitative information, and engaging in discussions that exhibit critical thinking while appreciating the viewpoints of others while showing respect and sensitivity for others.
3. Demonstrate sociological and international awareness such as giving examples of sociocultural or international contexts that can create differences among individuals and groups of people, recognizing the potential and actual sources of prejudicial attitudes and behaviors in oneself and others, and articulate the psychological factors that can lead to the use of social privilege and power for oppression on the one hand or to further equity on the other hand.
4. Demonstrate personal development such as applying psychological science to explain one’s own and others’ behavior and psychological processes and use psychological science to develop effective strategies for relating to others and addressing personal deficits using psychological knowledge.
5. Demonstrating engagement, outreach, and integration of learning and outreach.

**Psychology Department approach to teaching the 10 learning outcomes.**

1. Knowledge base of psychology (Discipline-specific knowledge). The major is structured such that students take one course from each of 4 groups that represent several content domains of psychology. All our courses emphasize a scientific approach to psychology.
2. Research methods. Our curriculum emphasizes research methods beginning with Introductory Psychology (Psyx 100IS). All Psychology majors must take 2 semesters of research methods PSYX 223, PSYX 225. In addition, research methods and the critique of research is emphasized in virtually all our discipline-specific courses. All Psychology majors must develop a PSYX 499R (Senior Thesis Capstone) research project based on either their undergraduate research experience in PSYX 490R or their field practicum experience in PSYX 495.
3. Critical thinking. An emphasis of Psyx 223, 225, 490R, and 499R is application of critical thinking to research in psychology in designing research. Other courses address critical thinking less directly.
4. Applications of psychology. An emphasis of Psyx 495 (Field Practicum) is the application of psychological knowledge to field experience. Psyx 370 (Learning), 375 (Behavior Modification) and 475 (Advanced Behavior Analysis) apply theories of learning and motivation to analysis of every day behavior. Other courses address applications of psychology less directly.
5. Values in psychology. Psyx 223 and Psyx 490R both require that students complete training in the ethical conduct of research. Other courses directly address diversity issues: Psyx 235D (Contemporary Issues in Human Sexuality), Psyx 335 (Psychology of Gender) and Psyx 462 (Psychology of Prejudice).
6. Information and technological literacy. Psyx 225, 490R, and 499R require that students perform searches using library data bases. These courses and Psyx 223 also require that students use statistical and graphical computer programs.
7. Communication skills. Psyx 223, 490R, 499R require that students present complete research presentations (either orally or as posters), including quantitative research results. These courses require written research papers as well. Psyx 225 requires a written paper of a research project. Other papers require written papers of various sorts.
8. Sociocultural and international awareness. Psyx 235D (Contemporary Issues in Human Sexuality), Psyx 335 (Psychology of Gender), Psyx 462 (Psychology of Prejudice) and Psyx 360 (Social Psychology) all address the ways in which sociocultural factors influence behavior.
9. Personal development. Psyx 375 (Behavior Modification) and 475 (Advanced Behavior Analysis) both apply theories of learning and motivation to analysis of every day behavior.
10. Engagement and Outreach. The goal of Psyx 495 (Field Practicum) is to gain experience in an applied setting aimed at improving the lives of community residents in critical areas such as retirement communities, educational settings, treatment and therapy centers, domestic abuse centers, etc…

**Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

The department uses the following measures to track progress in learning outcomes during the major and within courses. We use the following 5 measurements to track progress…

1. Rubric for Capstone presentations (oral or poster)
   1. The Department uses a Capstone assessment developed at Lawrence University (see Appendix A). The rubric assesses Critical Thinking, Oral Communication, Values & Ethics, Methodology and Research, and Diversity. Starting this year, we will add a question on applying psychology to address practical problems (Outcome 4). We use this assessment for each Senior Thesis poster conference (every semester).
2. Written communication will be assessed by examining written APA-style final papers from two courses: Psyx 225 and Psyx 499. In the previous assessment, we relied on external graders to assess performance using an external (LEAP) rubric (see previous assessment plan). However, we feel the course instructors themselves have the most expertise in assessing these papers. Also, our past independent assessments based on LEAP correlated almost perfectly (*r* = .80) with the instructors own grading. This provides evidence that our normal grading procedure already incorporates the important elements of the LEAP Critical Thinking rubric, rendering the external LEAP assessment useless.
3. Senior survey. The department has administered a Senior Survey to students completing the capstone course, Psyx 499R, for almost a decade. The senior survey contains questions about satisfaction with courses, the overall program, research and practicum experience, career and academic advising, faculty, and job and career intentions after graduation.
   * 1. The department will continue the Senior Survey in its current form. This will allow comparisons over time.
     2. The department will attempt to coordinate with the Alumni Foundation to study the employment and educational endeavors and satisfaction of students post-graduation.
4. Knowledge base of psychology.
   1. The members of the MSU Psychology Department view the best assessment of content-specific learning goals as by the use of standardized exams. *Funds are not currently available to carry out such an assessment.* In principle, standardized exams could be administered to freshmen and to seniors, yielding an informative view of progress.
      1. Some psychology departments are developing standardized exams themselves. Our department does not have the resources for development of an in-house standardized exam.
      2. ETS publishes a ‘major field test’ for Psychology.
   2. Lacking resources from the university to carry out 4.a., the department has chosen to use final exams in content areas within psychology as our assessment of psychology knowledge. In the past we instead used specific criterion-referenced items, but these were not helpful in assessing our program. Each semester one course in each of our 4 main psychology content areas (Physiological, Cognitive, Social, and Developmental/Abnormal) will be chosen (see Table 1). The department goal for these criterion-referenced content items will be 80% correct.
5. Other metrics: Engagement, Outreach, and Integration of Learning and Engagement; Research productivity and student research funding.
   1. The department tracks the number of students and student credit hours in Psyx 490R (research), Psyx 495 (Field Practicum) as measures of Engagement, Outreach, and Integration opportunities successfully offered to our students.
   2. The department tracks the number of students receiving different forms of research funding, such as USP, INBRE, etc.
   3. The department tracks the number of students who are authors or co-authors on presentations at student conferences and professional research conferences.
   4. The department tracks the number of students who are authors or co-authors on publications in peer-refereed journals.

*Table1.* Timeline for the Psychology department’s undergraduate assessment.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 | Rubrics | Courses for data |
| 1. Psychology Knowledge Base | X | X | X | X | Final Exam Performance | *Courses in 4 Required Core areas. A minimum of 2 courses per year.* |
| 2. Research Methods | X | X | X | X | Lawrence Rubric, publications/ presentations | Psyx 499R  Psyx 223, 225, 490R |
| 3. Critical thinking in Psychology | X |  | X |  | Lawrence Rubric | Psyx 499R |
| 4. Apply psychology to practical problems |  | X |  | X | Enrollment, Placement, Lawrence Rubric | Psyx 495, Psyx 499R |
| 5. Values in psychology | X |  | X |  | Lawrence Rubric | Psyx 499R |
| 6. Information and technological literacy |  | X |  | X | Lawrence Rubric | Psyx 499R plus others |
| 7. Communication skills | X |  | X |  | Lawrence Rubric, Final Projects | Psyx 225, 499R |
| 8. Sociocultural and international awareness |  |  |  | X | Lawrence Rubric | Psyx 235D, 333, 335, 462 |
| 9. Personal development | X |  | X |  | Senior survey | Psyx 375, 475, 490, 495, 499R |
| 10. Engagement, Outreach, Integration |  | X |  | X | Reported by faculty and from MSU online info | Psyx 490R, Psyx 495, Psyx 499R |
| Subjective Opinions/suggestions | X | X | X | X | Senior survey | Psyx 499R |

**Appendix A.** Lawrence University Psychology Department Capstone Assessment

Evaluation of Senior Capstone Presentations Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Critical Thinking**

1. The presentation demonstrated critical thinking about psychological research.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

1. The presentation demonstrated understanding of the interplay between psychological theory and research.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

**Oral Communication**

1. The presentation was well organized.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

1. Important points were clearly explained.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

1. The style of the presentation was engaging.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

**Values & Ethics**

1. The presentation reflects an understanding of the values and ethics of psychologists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Applicable

very weak average very strong

**Methodology & Research**

1. Presented research evidence was relevant and accurate.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

very weak average very strong

1. If an empirical project, the student clearly communicated the methodology.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Applicable

very weak average very strong

1. If an empirical project, the student highlighted and explained key findings.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Applicable

very weak average very strong

**Diversity**

1. The presentation reflected understanding of the diversity issues relevant to the student’s topic.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Applicable

very weak average very strong

1. The project involved using psychology to address practical problems.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Applicable

very weak average very strong