



**Department of Psychology
Curriculum Review Report**

PUBLIC REPORT

**Faculty of Arts
University of Calgary**

November 18, 2015

Program Context

The Department of Psychology's mission is *Achieving Excellence and Innovation in the Discovery and Translation of Psychological Knowledge through Research and Education*. Our vision is to be leaders and innovators in research, student success, and community engagement.

Psychology is one of the largest academic programs in the Faculty of Arts. Our Department currently consists of 35 full-time faculty members plus 2 full-time instructors. Psychology is an extremely popular area of study—in 2015-16 the Department supports 839 Psychology majors across its BA/BA (Honours) and BSc/BSc (Honours) degree program—the largest number of majors in the Faculty of Arts. To meet this high level of demand, this year we are offering 78 undergraduate courses to 6,271 course enrollees (including 336 course enrollees in the Red Deer College Collaborative degree program). Courses at the 200-300 level provide service to majors from many other academic programs and units across campus, whereas courses at the 400-500 level are typically restricted to Psychology majors. Given the demand for Psychology courses, coupled with teaching reductions for faculty for their research and service roles, the Department relies on sessional instruction for many of its undergraduate courses. The Department provides a very active research environment for students in both its undergraduate and graduate programs. In addition, the Department is dedicated to achieving excellence in teaching, as evidenced by its many teaching award nominations and recipients.

Guiding Questions

1. What are the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) we want our students to be prepared to achieve? What is our shared vision of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that our programs should provide?
2. How well are our course offerings and degree requirements covering our PLOs (Curriculum Mapping data)? Are there gaps, redundancies, and misalignments? How can we modify our courses and program requirements to provide better coverage of our PLOs?
3. What Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) are our courses trying to achieve (Curriculum Mapping data)? How well do these CLOs cover our PLOs?
4. What Instructional and Assessment methods do our instructors use to evaluate students' progress toward our PLOs at each course level (Curriculum Mapping data)? Are we appropriately scaffolding our instruction and assessment across course levels? Are we utilizing a diverse enough array of instructional and assessment methods?
5. What changes to our undergraduate program are suggested by our Faculty Survey, our OIA/NSSE data, and by our Student Satisfaction Survey?

Action Plan

Our Student Satisfaction Survey indicates that our graduates are generally satisfied. The data sources generated during our curriculum review (curriculum mapping, faculty survey, student satisfaction survey, OIA/NSSE data) were reviewed at Department Meetings in Winter 2015. This review revealed a number of areas in which changes to our undergraduate program could improve our program and better meet our Program Learning Outcome objectives. Toward this end, potential Action Plan items were generated and submitted by small groups of our Curriculum Review Team (i.e., faculty) during the May 2015 Retreat. These items were collated, distributed, and revised in light of the review team's feedback in Fall 2015. The final set of Action Plan items presented in this section is divided into three categories: general items, curriculum/course items, and program/learning outcome items. The items in each category are further divided into shorter-term (Years 1-2) and longer-term (Years 3-5) items. Our goal is to consider the shorter-term items prior to the interim report, and the longer-term items after the interim report and prior to the next curriculum review cycle. A subcommittee of the Undergraduate Committee will be constituted to prioritize and facilitate consideration of these action plan items, using working groups where possible to increase both faculty and student involvement. Carrying out this Action Plan will greatly enhance the quality of our undergraduate programs.

GENERAL ITEMS

Item 1: Include an Action Plan item on the Department meeting agenda whenever possible.

Rationale: Executing our Action Plan will require input and actions from all faculty. Dedicating a portion of Department meetings to our Action Plan will help us achieve our goals efficiently and effectively.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2). However, we hope that this will continue for the foreseeable future.

Item 2: Revise Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and descriptors in light of our mapping data.

Rationale: The curriculum-mapping task suggested that we might not be able to cover all of our PLOs. In those cases, the Department needs to discuss whether to commit to achieving them, or to revise, replace, or remove them. At the May retreat, the faculty also noted that some of our PLO descriptors are need to be tightened up or expanded. In those cases, revising our descriptors will ensure the changes we make to our undergraduate program achieve a shared vision.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 3: Provide our revised PLOs and descriptors on our Department website.

Rationale: Posting our revised PLOs and descriptors on our website will communicate our goals and commit us to achieving them. The knowledge and skills students can achieve from their psychology degrees will be made explicit and public for the first time. This will be helpful to students looking to understand what they will be getting out of their degree and their marketable skill sets.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 4: Revise our Student Satisfaction Survey to clarify where and why our students are dissatisfied, and consider setting up student focus groups to provide more information and potential solutions on identified areas for improvement.

Rationale: For example, our most recent survey indicated that a substantial portion of junior majors were not satisfied with the opportunities their Psyc courses offered them to express their ideas in writing. Survey responses could be used to select a focus group toward achieving our communication PLO. Students also expressed concerns about the quality of lab courses and/or lab TAs. Survey responses could be used to select a focus group toward improving students' experience in lab courses.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 5: Review PLO coverage by course level with an eye on eliminating redundancy and overlap.

Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty noted that in addition to ensuring adequate coverage of our PLOs, we should check for excessive redundancy and overlap in our coverage. Reducing this overlap, where appropriate, will create opportunities to enhance coverage of other PLOs.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 6: A committee will identify issues raised by our curriculum heat map, present those issues at a Department meeting, and moderate a discussion of our level of coverage of each PLO (introductory vs. competence vs. advanced) by course level. Some instructors will then be asked to revise the level of PLO coverage, or their indicated level of PLO coverage, where appropriate. The revised course-to-PLO coverage information will then be included on course outlines.

Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty noted some outliers in PLO coverage at a given level. Once the department has discussed these definitions, instructors can choose to revise the level of PLO coverage in their courses. Putting this information on course outlines will encourage instructors and students to consider how each course contributes to the Department's PLOs.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

Item 7: Begin the process of curriculum alignment. Educate instructors about curriculum alignment via a workshop from a Taylor Institute expert. Ask instructors to adjust their courses to align their CLOs with our PLOs, and to use instruction and assessment methods that reinforce their CLO-to-PLO linkages.

Rationale: Now that the Department has information about its PLOs, and about CLOs and instruction and assessment methods, we need to begin the process of curriculum alignment. Instructors will be tasked with taking steps to improve the alignment of CLOs and instruction and assessment methods with the Department's PLOs.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

Item 8: Review the Department's recent Grade Inflation Policy, which limits the expected percent of A grades for 200/300 and 400/500 level courses.

Rationale: The OIA data show that we are meeting our targets but in a few years we should review and discuss our grade distributions, as well as other potential effects of our policy (e.g., on student satisfaction, Honours applicant pool size, and course withdrawal rates).

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

CURRICULUM/COURSE ITEMS

Item 9: Identify which PLOs our lab courses should help students achieve, then review the lab course designation in light of those PLO goals, and revise our use of lab courses accordingly.

Rationale: This item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. Majors are required to complete 2 half-courses with a lab designation toward their degrees but it is not clear what we are trying to achieve through this degree requirement. We could remove the degree requirement or revise our use of the lab course designation (e.g., distinguish lab courses from tutorial courses) to achieve particular PLOs, such as teamwork, information literacy, or data analysis.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 10: Review our introductory psychology course offerings (Psyc 203, Psyc 200/201).

Rationale: Part of this item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. Psyc 203 is our introductory course for nonmajors. Psyc 200/201 are our introductory courses for majors, and recently replaced our former Psyc 205 course. We will review and discuss the content, PLO coverage, and function of each course.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 11: Review the foundation-course options for our BA and BSc degrees and revise if necessary.

Rationale: This item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. We have not reviewed our foundation course options for our BA and BSc degrees in more than 10 years and it would be prudent to do so. Some courses at the 300 level are not included as foundational, causing low enrolment in both these courses and corresponding 400 level courses. By having certain 300 courses as not counting towards foundation level options, there is concern students cannot take these courses until late in their degree, as they focus on fulfilling course degree requirements.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 12: Discuss the idea of creating a new set of 500-level courses (“Advanced Topics in X”) to replace our Psyc 501 (Special Topics Seminar in Psychology) courses.

Rationale: This item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. Psyc 501 seminars are reserved for Honours students, who require 1 course for their degree. One way to provide a capstone experience for more students, while also giving Honours students more options for this degree requirement, could be to replace Psyc 501 with a set of decadalized 500-level courses with a 400-level methods/stats prerequisite. These courses would offer faculty a chance to teach in their areas of research expertise, thus integrating research into the classroom, while also providing a capstone experience for more of our majors, as recommended by the NSSE and other surveys (e.g., Stoloff et al., 2015). It would also help address concerns about student-faculty interaction, and allow more advanced development of several of our PLOs. Much of our advanced coverage comes at the 500 level courses, which are predominantly taken by Honours students.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

PROGRAM-LEARNING OUTCOME ITEMS

1. Demonstrate knowledge of psychological sciences

Item 13: Add content to Psyc 200/201 on key topics covered in our non-required 300-level courses.

Rationale: This item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. Adding coverage of topics that would introduce Psyc 321 (Industrial/Organizational Psychology), Psyc 330 (Health Psychology), and Psyc 349 (Language Development) will prepare students for the full range of courses we offer at the 300 level.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 14: Discuss creating additional 200-300 level courses such as a “Myths about Psychology” course.
Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty suggested that one way to enhance our coverage of this PLO (as well as PLOs 2 and 5) would be to create additional 200-300 level courses, such as a course that reviews and debunks common myths about psychology propagated by media and nonscientific sources.
Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

2. Think critically and solve problems

Item 15: Discuss creating a course on how to think critically and solve problems in Psychology.
Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty suggested that one way to enhance our coverage of this PLO would be to create a professional development course. We expect our students to learn critical thinking and problem solving skills, but we do not typically instruct or assess their development of these skills. We will weigh this versus/in addition to other items such as Item 9 (i.e. utilizing lab courses) and Item 12 (revising the utilization of the 500 level courses).
Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

3. Conduct research and analyze data

Research Methods/Data Analysis

Item 16: Create a listing of research opportunities on our website.
Rationale: Our Student Satisfaction Survey suggests that majors wish our Department provided more research experience opportunities. Creating a website list of Honours thesis supervisors, potential Psyc 499 (Research Experience in Psychology) opportunities, and Research Assistant positions will make such opportunities easier for our students to find.
Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 17: Discuss creating a “Research in Psychology” course to provide students more hands-on opportunities to apply and hence consolidate their Psyc 312 (Experimental Design and Quantitative Methods for Psychology) learning of research methods and/or data analysis.
Rationale: A recurring concern that arose during our curriculum review is that students “forget” their Psyc 312 knowledge and skills by the time they need to apply them in their 400-level courses. It is worth discussing a course in which students conduct research projects that build on their Psyc 312 learning (e.g., a course required the year after completing Psyc 312). Such a course would also help prepare Honours students for their theses.
Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 18: Discuss changing Psyc 312 to Psyc 212 to make “room” for a new research methods/data analysis course.
Rationale: Enhancing our coverage of this PLO (see Item 17) may require a new course for which Psyc 312 would be the prerequisite. Because prerequisites must be at a lower level, either Psyc 312 would need to move to the 200 level (Psyc 212), or the 400-level courses requiring this new course would need to move to the 500 level. Changing Psyc 312 to Psyc 212 would require removing Psyc 200/201 as prerequisites. This would allow for more coverage of Data Analysis at the “Competence” level.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 19: Address our coverage of qualitative research given the infrequent offering of Psyc 415 (Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology).

Rationale: The Department should review and discuss its coverage of qualitative research methods and data analysis, including coverage in Psyc 312, as well as the need for additional instructors for Psyc 415.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 20: Workshop some ideas for incorporating data analysis in our 400-level non-lab courses.

Rationale: Our curriculum heat map shows little coverage of this PLO outside lab and seminar-style 400-level courses. We will workshop and share suggestions for how to incorporate data analysis content and instruction/assessment methods in our 400-level non-lab courses.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 21: Discuss creating additional senior-level data-analysis courses.

Rationale: This item was suggested during our May retreat. Currently, Psyc 411 (Design and Analysis in Psychological Research) is our only regularly offered data-analysis course beyond Psyc 312. We will discuss whether offering data-analysis courses beyond Psyc 411 might be more feasible if they did not have a formal lab component.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 22: Review Psyc 499 (Research Experience in Psychology) with an eye on enhancing PLO coverage.

Rationale: Psyc 499 is a recent course offering designed to give students hands-on research opportunities. Its curriculum map suggests that it may not cover this and other PLOs at a level comparable with other 400-level courses. We should review this course to ensure it warrants a 400-level designation. If it does, then we should encourage more students to take it (e.g., make it a degree requirement for Honours students). We could also discuss creating a Psyc 399 course to provide an introductory level acquisition of certain PLOs, while requiring higher-level coverage for such a research course to be classified as a 499. Greater utilization of this course will help to alleviate concerns about not having enough student-faculty interaction.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

4. Communicate effectively in writing and in person

Written Communication

Overarching Issue: Our curriculum heat map revealed a gap in our coverage of this PLO component such that most 300-level courses are “introductory” and most 400-level courses are “advanced”. In addition, few courses provide direct instruction for this PLO. In addition, our Student Satisfaction Survey indicates that only 42% of our majors were “Satisfied/Very Satisfied” with their opportunities for written assignments at the 300 Level.

Item 23: Arrange for an expert from the Taylor Institute to share ideas for enhancing instruction and assessment of written communication to help close the gap in our coverage from the 300 to 400 level.

Rationale: Consulting with experts will help bootstrap our ability to achieve this PLO.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 24: Create a working group to research, develop, and share methods to promote this PLO earlier and more effectively (e.g., a block week course with tutorials on “Writing in Psychology”).

Rationale: A working group could be tasked with bootstrapping our ability to achieve this PLO.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 25: Create a Departmental policy requiring written communication, and instruction and assessment of written communication, at the 300 level.

Rationale: This item was endorsed in the 2014 Faculty Survey. Formalizing our commitment to this PLO will ensure that TA support is dedicated at the 300 level to helping students achieve this PLO at a “competency” level before they take 400-level courses that aim at an “advanced” level.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Oral Communication

Overarching Issue: Our curriculum heat map revealed that we expect students to achieve an “advanced” level coverage of this PLO at the 400-level, but we provide little coverage of it at the 200-300 level, and we also provide little by way of instruction.

Item 26: Revise the descriptors for this PLO component to include other forms of oral communication.

Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty noted that oral communication could also include contributions in class, small group discussions, and debates.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 27: Create a working group to research, develop, and share methods to promote this PLO earlier and more effectively (e.g., a block week course with tutorials on “Presentations in Psychology”; requiring 3-minute-thesis type presentations in some of our 300-level courses).

Rationale: A working group could be tasked with facilitating our achievement of this PLO.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Teamwork and interpersonal effectiveness

Overarching issue: The curriculum mapping data revealed that we provide little instruction in teamwork (less than 10% of courses) despite expecting students to achieve an “advanced” level of competence in this PLO in some of our courses.

Item 28: Revise our descriptors of this PLO component; consider dropping “Interpersonal Effectiveness”.

Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty identified a need to revise the descriptors for this PLO.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 29: Create a working group to research, develop, and share methods to promote this PLO earlier and more effectively (e.g., collaborative learning, group projects), where appropriate.

Rationale: A working group could be tasked with bootstrapping our ability to achieve this PLO.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 30: Share ideas for incorporating teamwork, including its instruction and assessment, at both the 300 and 400 level, where appropriate.

Rationale: Sharing ideas could bootstrap our ability to achieve this PLO at the 300 and 400 level.

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

5. Demonstrate information literacy

Item 31: Discuss means of achieving greater coverage of this PLO.

Rationale: Despite good coverage of this PLO, at the May retreat the faculty noted that many students lack sufficient information literacy, particularly early in the program. We could consult with our subject area librarian for resources we could share with our students. We could also consider creating a block week course to help students achieve greater informational literacy (e.g., what constitutes a good source, how to process information, how to find information, how to use databases and search engines).

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

6. Operate ethically and with integrity

Item 32: Discuss means of achieving greater coverage of this PLO.

Rationale: Our curriculum map suggests that this PLO receives the least coverage (e.g., very few CLOs were directed at this PLO), instruction, and assessment in our courses. For example, we could discuss requiring all majors to complete the online TCPS certification. We could also consider creating a block week course aimed at helping students achieve this PLO (e.g., ethical dilemmas, ethics in society).

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

7. Apply psychological knowledge and skills

Item 33: Discuss methods of collecting and communicating career information to our students, starting early in their program (e.g., sharing information from Alumni surveys, asking PSYCHS to schedule Alumni presentation sessions).

Rationale: Our Student Satisfaction Survey indicates that our students want to learn more about what they can do with their Psychology degrees (e.g., marketable skills, career options).

Timeline: Shorter-term (Years 1-2).

Item 34: Discuss means of facilitating students' ability to identify and market their career-related skills.

Rationale: Our graduate students have access to such opportunities via MyGrad Skills. At the May retreat, the faculty suggested we explore implementing a similar resource for undergraduates.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

Item 35: Discuss ways of fostering and recognizing students' co-curricular and volunteer activities.

Rationale: At the May retreat, the faculty suggested we discuss barriers to creating formal co-curricular options, and to provide ways of recognizing students who engage in non-course-based activities that help them to achieve this PLO.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

Item 36: Discuss creating a required capstone course aimed at applying all of the PLOs.

Rationale: The Student Satisfaction Survey suggests that non-Honours majors could benefit from more opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills, perhaps through a capstone course.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).

Item 37: Discuss creating a practicum course option or requirement for majors (e.g., co-op).

Rationale: Many jobs require a university degree, but relevant experience is a critical component to getting most jobs. Practicum or co-op experience would help students achieve this PLO by applying their knowledge and skills in real-world settings. A working group could review and discuss implementing practicum models such as the one used in the Haskayne School of Business.

Timeline: Longer-term (Years 3-5).