**MSU Departmental**

**Assessment Report, May 2017**

Academic Year: 2016-2017

Department: Psychology

Program(s): Psychology

## 1. What Was Done

This year we completed the first year of our 2016-2020 4-year assessment plan. This year, our psychology department assessment called for assessing students’ performance on learning outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9 (see Table 1 in Psychology 2016-2020 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 (Memory & Cognition and Developmental Psychology) during the spring 2017 semester. These two courses correspond to 2 of the 4 core breadth areas required of all majors.

**Outcome 2** concerns mastery of research methodology. We assessed this in Psychology majors’ senior thesis (Psyx 499) capstone course. Psyx 499 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 2016-2020 undergraduate assessment plan).

**Outcome 3** concerns Critical Thinking. We assessed this by examining questions 1 and 2 on the Lawrence University Psychology capstone assessment during senior thesis. Possible scores on this Assessment ranged from 1 (very weak) to 7 (very strong). (see Appendix A in Psychology 2016-2020 undergraduate assessment plan).

**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).

**Outcome 7** concerns communication skills. This is assessed both in our 225 course based on their final written papers and in Psyx 499R based on the questions 3-5 on the Lawrence assessment. Final papers in Research design and Analysis II (Psyx 225) allows students to demonstrate their knowledge of synthesizing research, writing APA style, and conceptualizing results and implications. Questions 3-5 on the Lawrence Assessment focus on oral communication skills.

**Outcome 9** concerns personal development. Psychology of Learning (Psyx 370), Behavior Modification (Psyx 375), and Advanced Behavioral Analysis (Psyx 475) involve applying psychological principles to everyday life. We assess outcome 9 through our senior survey (described below).

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 Developmental Psychology multiple-choice final exam score from Psychology majors (N = 44) was 84%, with a range of 64-95% and an even distribution. An average score above 75% indicates acceptable learning of this material. For Memory and Cognition, the final exam score was cumulative with both multiple-choice and short answer responses. The average score was 79% with a range of 60-98% and an even distribution. Again, the average score above 75% indicates acceptable learning of this material.

**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 13 evaluations in the fall and 18 evaluations in the spring. A few students were evaluated by more than one observer. Ratings of students on these 3 questions were 5.4, 5.8, and 5.3 in the fall and 5.8, 5.9, and 5.4 in the spring. Thus, in both semesters, students were rated as demonstrating above average methodology and research skills. Moreover, the average scores for these questions are mostly in line with those from previous years (5.5, 5.7, and 5.8). Only Q9 (“the student highlighted and explained key findings”) seems to have dropped slightly from previous years (from 5.80 to 5.35).

**Outcome 3** concerns Critical Thinking. Ratings of students on these 2 questions were 5.6 and 6.0 in the fall and 5.9 and 5.9 in the spring. The average of these semesters (5.8 and 5.8) are identical to previous years. Moreover, these scores reflect above-average critical thinking skills.

**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 5.8 in the fall and 6.1 in the spring, demonstrating above average scores on values and ethics. The average of 5.9 is identical to previous years. In addition to this measure, all Psychology majors completed the CITI human research online training course as part of their Research Design and Analysis requirements.

**Outcome 7** concerns communication skills. In our two sections of Psyx 225, the final research proposal written paper scores were 85% and 79%, respectively. These scores represent acceptable demonstration of written communication skills. From the Lawrence Assessment, oral communication scores were 6.2, 5.7, and 6.1 in the fall and 6.2, 6.0, and 6.1 in the spring. These scores are above average and are approaching ”very high” oral communication skills. The average scores across semesters (6.0, 5.8, & 6.0) are almost identical to previous years (5.9, 5.8, & 5.9).

**Outcome 9** concerns personal development. As is usually the case, the relevant courses were filled near capacity both semesters (92%), indicating high interest in these courses among our majors. Our **Senior Survey** also concerns personal development, but also subjective ratings of our program, courses, engagement opportunities, and advising. We scored at or above average (average response of 3.0) on all 4 questions, with fall scores of 4.1, 4.0, 4.0, and 3.0 on satisfaction overall, for regular courses, for research and field practicum opportunities, and for advising, respectively. For spring, these respective scores were 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, and 3.2. The average across semesters for the program, courses, and engagement were equal to the previous couple years’ scores of 4.1, 4.2, and 4.2, respectively and greater than during the 2005-2010 years (N = 180 polled) of 3.6, 3.9, and 3.7, respectively. For advising, our AY score of 3.1 is less than the previous couple year’s score of 3.4, but higher than during the 2005-2010 years (2.8). As is common, in AY a7 a majority of our student planned to apply to graduate school upon graduation (18/25 in the fall and 26/37 in the spring). Open-ended comments on strengths included phenomenal professors who are world class researchers but also fantastic and caring instructors, diverse range of classes, our Admin assistant Brenda, the peer-advising program, and engagement opportunities. Comments on weaknesses included wanting more “real-world” classes, problems with Traphagen hall and particularly room 308, lack of classrooms, some poor instructors, and concerns with either not seeing their advisor enough, the advising office, or lack of career-specific advising.

## 4. How We Responded

The psychology faculty met twice in the spring to discuss the assessment. Performance on all outcomes were deemed generally acceptable. However, we are implementing a few changes based on this assessment and our own intuition, which aligned with the assessment in a couple areas. For **outcome 1**, we were pleased with the results that our students were understanding the core knowledge of our required breadth fields. For **outcome 2**, the drop in scores for question 9 from previous years is consistent with our informal observations that the statistical knowledge was somewhat lacking. We believe this is because of a push to get our tenure-track faculty teaching more of the main content areas of psychology. Unfortunately, this means NTT instructors are instead teaching our capstone senior thesis course. As a result, we think the statistics knowledge in 499R is suffering. In short, the major problem is that we simply do not have enough tenure-track faculty to cover both the important core content knowledge in psychology and the research methodology training in courses such as Psyx 499R, Psyx 223, and Psyx 225. Because the fall schedule is set already and some TT faculty are either on leave, left MSU, retired, or buying out of teaching, there is nothing we can do about this for the fall. However, faculty have agreed to rotate in teaching Psyx 499R starting spring 2018. There were no concerns based on **outcome 5 and 7**, and no changes are recommended. Finally, we are working to address issues that came up in **outcome 9** and the **senior surveys**. First, this year we renovated Trap 308, where a majority of our courses are taught, to hopefully make it more modern, accommodating, and conducive to learning. In addition, 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 again working to increase the diversity of courses offered. This fall alone, there are 5 new courses offered, with another 2 new courses proposed for next spring. There are several issues relevant to the concern with advising. First, this was a transition year in which a central CLS advisor will assist students their first year. Second, our professional advisor quit in December after the birth of her son, which left us scrambling this spring to advise students. We are currently interviewing a replacement, but that position was just cut from 1.0FTE to 0.5FTE due to an impending CLS budget deficit. As a result, advising will undoubtedly continue to suffer and the new person will only have time for course scheduling and not enough time to oversee the advising center. Faculty continue to advise students, and I will make sure to advising refreshers again in the fall, we will work on improving career advising at all levels, and again communicate better to students that every psychology major has a faculty advisor whom they must meet with at least once per semester.