

UGC Report on Psychology Annual Program Review
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A. Introduction

The Department of Psychology's undergraduate academic programs include both B.A. and B.S. degrees as well as a minor and an upper-level certificate, Psychology of the Workplace. The Department offers undergraduate academic programs at both UMBC's Main campus and at the Shady Grove consortium campus. Students can complete the B.A. degree, the minor, and the Psychology of the Workplace certificate program at either location. The B.S. degree program is only offered at Main campus.

The Psychology Department has the fourth largest number of majors at UMBC and is the third largest provider of credits attempted. Between Fall 2013 and Fall 2017, on average 847 students were pursuing B.A. degrees in Psychology and 263 the B.S. degree. Psychology also has the largest number of minors in the university—480 on average.

The Department also operates a number of graduate programs. It offers Ph.D. programs in Applied Development Psychology and Human Services Psychology (HSP) as well as several masters programs. Within HSP, the Department offers a M.A. program in Applied Behavioral Analysis, a M.P.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Shady Grove in partnership with the Department of Professional Studies (DPS), and an on-line M.A. program in Institutional Systems Design (also in partnership with DPS). In addition, the Department offers three non-degree graduate certificate programs.

The Psychology Department reported in Spring 2019 that it had 34 full-time tenured/tenure-track and lecturer faculty with instructional roles. Between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018, the Psychology Department also relied on the services of 12 part-time faculty on average to deliver its academic programs.

B. Student Learning Outcomes

The Psychology Department uses two methods to evaluate learning outcomes for its majors. First, it employs standard evaluation rubrics to assess directly learning outcomes. For the five-semester period (Fall 2015-Fall 2017), the Department used such a rubric to evaluate skills associated with "writing in the discipline" in its 400-level courses, most of which are officially designated "writing intensive" (WI). Second, the Department indirectly assesses ten learning outcome areas through a self-report survey. The Department administered such a survey in Spring 2017 in its 400-level courses. In addition, the Department assessed learning outcomes in two of its GEP courses, PSYC 210 (The Psychology of Learning) and PSYC 200 (Child Developmental Psychology).

With regard to the direct assessment of writing skills in its 400-level classes, the Psychology Department reports that over the five-semester period and across the seven skills assessed,

only a small proportion of students (between 0 and 5%) were rated as “Not Competent.” The Department also reports that the percentage of students rated as “Minimally Competent” varied considerably (4% to 42%) across semesters and skill areas. The Department responded to the somewhat disappointing results revealed in the initial semesters of the assessment period by instigating a review and revision of its curriculum. In consequence, the Department notes an improvement in the data by Fall 2017 which reveal that fewer students were rated “Not Competent” or “Minimally Competent” in three important skill areas—“applying concepts and principles”, “critical thinking”, and “writing skills.”

In Spring 2017 to supplement its direct assessment of learning outcomes, the Psychology Department asked students in seven of its 400-level courses to complete a self-assessment survey. The survey asked students to “rate the degree to which they have achieved” ten learning goals for the undergraduate major recommended by the 2006 American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines. The survey had 78 total respondents (64% of enrollment). The mean ratings across all ten skill areas were quite high. The Department notes that the results of this survey compares favorably to similar surveys administered in the Fall 2013 and Fall 2015 semesters.

Learning outcomes for the GEP courses PSYC 200 (Child Developmental Psychology) and PSY C 210 (The Psychology of Learning) were assessed in Fall 2015 and Spring 2018, respectively. Each course evaluated learning outcomes in skill areas related to the course’s designated functional competency. PSYC 200 measured learning outcomes in skill areas for “Critical Analysis and Reasoning” and PSYC 210 assessed those for “Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning.” Results for PSYC 200 revealed that between 75.7% and 87.5% of students demonstrated competent performances on each of the four assessed skill elements. However, only 52.3% of students demonstrated competency across all four. In response, the Department reviewed both course pedagogy and materials. Beginning in 2017, a new core textbook and software package were adopted for the course. With respect to PSYC 210, the periodic on-line skill assessments that students were encouraged to take proved an inadequate tool for measuring learning outcomes. The assessments were insufficiently tied to students’ course grades. Only a modest “extra credit” was offered, so the effort students brought to the assessment was suspect and the most capable students simply did not bother to participate.

C. State of the Discipline; Program Modifications, Program Changes

The Psychology Department has substantially changed its undergraduate curriculum since its 2012 APR. These changes were made in response to data gathered from SLOA and in light of the 2013 American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major in Psychology. These guidelines specify five learning objectives for undergraduate psychology students: 1) Knowledge Base in Psychology, 2) Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking, 3) Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World, 4) Communication, and 5) Professional Development.

The Department developed two courses to introduce students to the science and profession of Psychology, PSYC 211 for incoming first- and second-year students and PSYC 309 for transfer students. It created a methods course, PSYC 311, which is taught from the “consumer of research” perspective as well as a Research Methods II course designed for B.S. and B.A. students who aspire to graduate study in Psychology. In addition, the Department created a “Diversity” specialization within the major, added prerequisite courses to its core required courses (ENGL 100 for PSYC 211/309 and STAT 121 for PSYC 311), and revised most of its 400-level courses (17 in total) as officially designated WI courses.

D. Undergraduate Curriculum

Bachelor of Arts students in Psychology complete a 35-credit major; Bachelor of Science majors complete a 72-credit major which includes 24 credits in the natural sciences and mathematics. The minor in Psychology is 19 credits and the Psychology of the Workplace Certificate is a 31-credit program.

The B.A. degree in Psychology requires students to take PSYC 100 (Introduction to Psychology, 4 credits), PSYC 211 or 309, PSYC 311 (4 credits), and one course in each of the discipline’s six domains of knowledge. No more than three of these six courses can be at the 200-level. Finally, B.A. majors must complete two elective courses, one of which must be a 400-level capstone seminar. Students pursuing the B.A. in Psychology are also strongly encouraged to pursue credit-bearing internship opportunities through PSYC 398.

Bachelor of Science majors in Psychology must complete the following core courses: PSYC 100, 211 or 309, 311, 312, 210 (Psychology of Learning), 335 (Physiological Psychology) and 370 (Sensation and Perception). Since PSYC 210, 335, and 370 fit into two of Psychology’s six domains of knowledge (Learning and the Biological Bases of Behavior), B.S. majors by virtue of their core coursework need to complete one course in each of the remaining four domains, only two of which can be at the 200-level. They must complete 24 credits in the natural sciences and mathematics: MATH 150 (or MATH 155), BIOL 141, BIOL 142, BIOL 302, CHEM 101 and CHEM 102 (or CHEM 123 and 124). In addition, B.S. majors must complete 6 credits of approved research experience via PSYC 397 and/or PSYC 490 or PSCY 498/499. Finally, B.S. students must also complete 6 elective credits, one of which must be a 400-level course.

Psychology majors may also choose to complete a concentration in psychology. These concentrations provide depth and breadth of knowledge for students interested in pursuing bachelor-level careers in particular areas of psychology. The Psychology Department offers four concentrations: 1) Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Psychology, 2) Developmental Psychology, 3) Human Services Psychology, and 4) Biopsychology. All four include five required core courses, three or four electives from a list of appropriate courses, and three credits of research experience or internship. Coursework for a concentration counts where applicable to the completion of the major. Students who complete a concentration receive a Department certificate. Concentrations do not show up on student transcripts.

The 19-credit minor in Psychology requires students to complete PSYC 100 and one course from five of the six domains of knowledge in the field. No more than two of these five courses can be 200-level courses.

Students from any major can pursue the Psychology of the Workplace Certificate. (The Psychology Department anticipates a name change for this certificate program. Once all approvals are secured, it will be the Industrial Organizational Psychology Certificate.) This certificate program includes a core of seven required courses—one research design/analysis or statistics course, four psychology courses and two management courses. It also requires students to complete three elective courses from an interdisciplinary list and a 3-credit internship.

E. Research Opportunities for Undergraduates

The Psychology Department reports that between AY 2013 and AY 2017 an average of 25 students made research presentations at UMBC's Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement Day (URCAD). The Department affirms that it is strongly committed to providing research experience to as many of its majors as possible. In fact, the B.S. program requires students to complete 6 credits of PSYC 397 (Research Experience) or some other approved credit-bearing research. The Department notes, however, that it cannot satisfy the demand for quality research experiences for its sizable B.A. population. It reports that only 22% of Psychology majors are enrolled in the variable credit PSYC 397 at any one time and given that many among the 22% are enrolled multiple times, the actual number of students engaged in research is less than this figure would appear to indicate. Part of the student research challenge is due to the fact that lecturers comprise the Department's full-time faculty at Shady Grove and research is not part of lecturers' workload. This means that there are no faculty research teams for students to join. Shady Grove students who are interested in such opportunities must pursue them on Main campus. Lecturers at Shady Grove do, however, routinely mentor students in independent study (PSYTC 490).

F. Undergraduate Advisement

Psychology students at UMBC's Main campus are advised by a combination of professional academic advisor, graduate students, and full-time faculty. First-year freshmen, transfer students, and newly declared Psychology majors meet for initial advising with the professional advisor. In semesters when demand for first-time advising is particularly high, the professional advisor is assisted by graduate student advisors. The professional advisor is also responsible for advising all Psychology minors (F 17 N=455). After the first semester of advising, majors are assigned randomly based on advising load to a faculty advisor. Faculty advisors meet with advisees minimally twice per academic year. In Spring 2018, the Department reported an average undergraduate faculty advising load of 35 students. However, some faculty advised as many as 48 students. In total that semester, FT faculty advised 1,054 students, nearly twice the number of students from Spring 2013.

At Shady Grove, Psychology majors are assigned to either one of three FT faculty members or to the Graduate Assistant for advising. Those assigned to the Graduate Assistant are usually re-assigned to a FT faculty advisor by their senior years as turnover among Graduate Assistants is fairly high. As has been the case on Main campus, there has been a steady uptick of Psychology students in need of advising at Shady Grove (from 110 in Sp 2013 to 129 in Sp 2018). While the advising load has been managed, the Department reports that it had no clear plan in place to address the high advising load going forward.

G. Council of Majors, Undergraduate Honors, Awards, and Recognition

The Psychology Department's APR Self-Study describes its Council of Majors as "moribund." Indeed, there is no mention of it on the departmental website. Its website does flag PSI CHI, the National Psychology Honors Society. Psychology majors with qualifying credits and GPAs are encouraged to join, but the Self-Study describes undergraduate participation in PSI CHI as "quite spotty year to year." Psychology majors with qualifying GPAs can participate in the Department's Honors Program. To graduate with departmental honors, students must have a departmental GPA of 3.5 or above and complete an honors thesis that is mentored through the two-course sequence, PSYC 498 and PSYC 499. The Department notes, however, that very few students choose to pursue departmental honors. Only 30 majors (or about .6%) completed the two-course honors sequence between Ay13 and AY 18.

As noted above, since the Department's last APR, 25 students on average present their independent research at URCAD. During this same time period, three Psychology majors on average have received Undergraduate Research Awards (URA).

H. Faculty Development and Teaching Quality

In 2007, the Psychology Department instituted a Faculty Mentoring Plan for new tenure-track faculty. New members of the faculty are paired with senior colleagues for mentoring on teaching as well as research. The Department also encourages its faculty to take advantage of resources available through the Faculty Development Center.

Teaching quality is routinely monitored through student course evaluations (SCEQs through Fall 16 and SEEQs since Spring 17). As part of the annual review process of full-time faculty, the Department Chair reviews the SCEQ/SEEQ scores of courses taught that academic year. If a faculty member receives scores under 3 on a five-point scale, the Chair will discuss possible reasons and ways to improve these low ratings.

Teaching quality of full-time faculty is most formally reviewed through the processes of promotion (for lecturers) and promotion and tenure (for tenured and tenure-track faculty). The teaching quality of tenured faculty is also assessed as part of five-year Comprehensive Reviews.

With regard to the teaching quality of adjunct instructors, the APR Self-Study indicates that the Department is developing a plan that will use peer observation and SEEQ reviews to ensure that adjunct instructors are meeting the teaching standards of the Department and the University. Thanks to a USM initiative that introduced new titles and new pay grades for part-time faculty, the Department instituted in 2012 a formal process for reviewing and promoting part-time faculty.

I. Additional Comments and Summary Evaluation

This report has focused exclusively on the Department of Psychology's undergraduate programs. It is important to remember, however, that the Psychology Department offers an array of graduate programs as well and its ability to deliver quality undergraduate programs is inextricably linked to the resources it has to operate all of its programs. The CAHSS Dean's Report for the Department of Psychology's APR cites evidence of significant resource strain. For example, the student-faculty ratio (SFR) for all academic programs in Psychology was 58.6 for full-time faculty in Fall 2018 and 50.5 for FTE faculty. The CAHSS average SFR for full-time faculty was 24.6 and for FTE faculty it was 20.6. The SFR in Psychology for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty was 77.9 as compared to the CAHSS average of 35.0. The Dean's Report also notes that within CAHSS the Psychology Department has by far the highest program enrollments per full-time faculty, per FTE faculty, and per tenured/tenure-track faculty. The Report goes further to underscore that this has been the case for years. In addition, the Dean's and Reviewers' Reports both conclude that the undergraduate and graduate advising load on PSYC faculty has become too large.

Given the clear evidence of resource strain, the Dean's recommendations that the Psychology Department receive four new faculty lines (above and beyond faculty replacement) over the next several years is totally reasonable. Also reasonable is the recommendation that the Department receive additional advising support through the CAHSS coordinated advising team.

