

**UMBC Psychology
Academic Program Review
External Reviewer Report**

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Revised on June 21, 2019**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The review process included two components: 1) On March 26, we were provided with a set of documents including the 2019 Department Self-Study and the University's Strategic Plan; 2) On April 29, we conducted a site visit, during which we met with representatives of the Department, of the Administration of UMBC, as well as with graduate and undergraduate students.

II. SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) Analysis

Strengths

1. Diversity and Inclusion: A clear department strength is in the areas of diversity (D) as well as inclusion (I). This was evidenced in student and faculty demographic composition, curriculum, in research foci, and increasingly in department climate and culture. Department faculty also contribute to and provide leadership in college- and university-level D&I efforts.
2. Student-focused curriculum: The department has been reflective and responsive in making curriculum changes that are responsive to identified student development needs, such as the Writing Fellows program.
3. Faculty mentoring: The department faculty peer mentoring policy and plan describes procedures and establishes guidelines to help ensure that the process continues through changes in leadership. This comprehensive document provides information about mentoring roles, how to develop a mentoring plan, and explicit department expectations.
4. University strategic plan: The graduate program foci are strongly aligned with the university strategic plan's emphasis on applied and community based initiatives and opportunities.
5. Integrative nature of graduate programs: Synergies exist between the two major M.A. and Ph.D. graduate programs, which focus on issues of applied, community engaged research that works with communities to increase knowledge, design interventions, improve outcomes, and better the lives of vulnerable populations.

Weaknesses

1. A focus on growth without a corresponding emphasis on vision: This is a critical area for the Department to address. In general, Psychology faculty's research and teaching interests are relatively scattered over many different areas and quite thin and isolated within each area. As a result, the department appears to have difficulty prioritizing them. Thus, at the undergraduate level, there are B.A. and B.S. degrees in psychology. At the graduate level, there are two doctoral programs, the Applied Developmental Psychology (ADP) and the Human Services Psychology (HSP) doctoral program, an M.A. in Applied

Behavior Analysis (ABA), a Master's of Professional Studies: (M.P.S.): Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology, and an M.A. in Instructional Systems Development (ISD). The department also offers an upper division certificate in Psychology of the Workplace (currently undergoing a name change to Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology) on both campuses. Numerous growth areas were identified in the self-study, such as expansion of the I-O MPS program, and a Ph.D. program in ABA. However, as noted in the 2012 APR and APR Third Year Review Action Plan, there is still a need to address the number and focus of existing graduate programs.

One possible solution is to facilitate an organic and realistic integration of different programs. For example, across HSP and ADP PhD programs, there are foci on issues of applied, community engaged research with community, organizational, and policy spaces to increase knowledge, design interventions, improve outcomes, and better the lives of historically vulnerable or marginalized populations. Before considering expansion of new PhD programs, take better advantage of strengths and integration opportunities for current programs. Making these strengths more visible would also support department goals for enhancing program national reputation and student recruitment/enrollment.

2. Faculty productivity was an identified area of challenge and potential. The faculty includes an impressive group of active scholars with diverse research foci and strong reputations in their respective fields. The relevance of department faculty's research foci to theory, practice, and policy should be highly attractive to funding agencies. This suggests a need for further analysis and action around barriers for some faculty to grant development, submission, as well as research writing and publication outcomes.
 - a. Address factors related to decrease in grant productivity - defined by department and college as fewer federal grants, increasing reliance on small foundation grants, and decreased grant submissions due to faculty discouragement about current funding landscape. While the department names several efforts to support grant writing, additional efforts might consider:
 - i. Focused supports and incentives for moving from small/seed grant and pilot data stage to larger external grant stage.
 - ii. Indirect distribution system for incentivizing departments and faculty PIs.
 - iii. Identification of promising collaboratives.
 - b. Research/publication productivity might be enhanced with similar analyses and evaluation of supports and incentives. Also, given the centrality of applied foci within the university strategic plan and mission, it may be relevant to examine whether/how faculty are developing scholarly products of impact beyond traditional peer review outlets. This might include impactful public scholarship efforts and outcomes that would affect time/capacity for traditional publication outcomes. If these types of impacts are important and valued, consider ways of explicitly integrating them into expectations and evaluation metrics of faculty research impact.

Opportunities

1. Space: Investment is needed for improvements in research space functionality. The Self Study detailed some serious issues regarding the resources and facility, such as roof leaks, air ventilations, and privacy needs. These issues need to be resolved promptly

and appropriately by the university because they may result in serious health and safety consequences. As to physical lab space in particular, although the department has a limited space in the buildings, from what we could see, there are still some redundancy and inefficiency in the use of space. This may be an opportunity for the department to re-consider the space assignment of faculty. Instead of dedicated space for each faculty member, some rooms can be shared to save the space and facilitate collaborations. Efforts might be preceded by a functionality analysis of the types of research and activities engaged by faculty and how spaces might be designed or re-designed to support specific functions, as well as potential collaboration/sharing across clusters of faculty.

2. External collaborations: A stronger cohesive sense of community, engagement and mission between our USG and Main campus faculty and students through shared initiatives such as finding more creative ways to support research experiences for USG undergraduate students and building hybrid electronic course sharing capabilities between the two campuses. The ABA program is successfully collaborating with the Kennedy Krieger Institute Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Threats

1. Faculty composition to achieve academic mission: Too many classes are taught by non-tenured/tenure-track faculty members. According to table AB, there is a significant decrease in 'percent of credit hours generated by T/TT faculty'. At the undergraduate level, only 17% for lower division and 37% for upper division were taught by T/TT faculty for FY14-18. At the graduate level, the number was 53%. In average, T/TT faculty generated 32% for FY14-18, compared to 42% average FY07-11. Only about half of T/TT faculty teach two classroom courses per semester. The rest of the courses are taught by five full-time instructors and 28 adjuncts. Although we understand that many adjuncts are excellent instructors, the trend is still alarming since it is very likely that students take only a few courses, or even no course, taught by the core faculty members before they graduate. Similarly, specialized graduate courses should ideally be taught by research-active core faculty members who are experts on the subject areas. We suggest that the department should review the policy and practice of 'buyout' by research active faculty from the perspective of student experience and success. We also suggest that the department should review workload requirements for faculty, such as student advising (see below).
2. Staff infrastructure and capacity: It is important to periodically address staff capacity surrounding advising, budgets, and workload requirements. The department currently has six supporting staff members, some of them are part-time. Considering the numbers of undergraduate psychology majors, graduate students, and faculty members, more supporting staff are essential for the student success and faculty productivity. For example, the department is relying on one professional staff member to advise undergraduate students. After the first meeting with the advisor, they are randomly assigned to a faculty advisor for the remainder of their time at UMBC. The faculty advising load is currently about 35 students in contrast to 25 students in FY2013. The Self Study states that "(T)he most recent advising period, Spring 2018, revealed a peak of 1,054 students advised by faculty, nearly twice the number of students from Spring 2013" (p. 146). It would be more efficient and economical to hire a few more professional advisors. Then, faculty can spend more time for research and perhaps more fulsome teaching.

III. Responses to the Questions formulated by the Department

- 1) Given the breadth and scope of our graduate programs, faculty research, and student foci relative to our number of full-time tenure track faculty, what are your suggestions for department and/or programmatic (re)organization(s) that might improve how we meet the needs of both students and faculty and allow for future growth/flexibility in our department?

This was addressed in the main document above. See Weakness #1.

What are the pros and cons of adding a January start to the normal September incoming I/O MPS program? We envision this would involve yearlong admissions reviews and duplicating core course offerings for two cohort classes per year. This would also necessitate hiring more adjuncts and full-time faculty (an expenditure against our bottom line). What other quality, quantity, and competitive advantages or disadvantages might this involve?

There is clear growth potential in the area of I-O psychology. I-O is the #1 fastest growing occupation in the United States, with a growth rate of 53 percent between 2014 and 2022. According to US News and World Report, I-O is the #2 best science job and the #19 best STEM job. Thus, there are incentives to grow the program. However, given the program location in the Baltimore-DC area, the small number of current faculty, and our previous concerns about the number of adjunct faculty, a feasibility study is recommended.

- 3) What are the best ways to balance adjunct and tenure -track faculty expertise for strong coverage of undergraduate curriculum and graduate curricula?

See Threats #1

- 4) What are your thoughts on our new PSYC 310-311, 312 methods and statistics sequence? How does it compare to peers'? What other innovative/best practices that we should consider?

Many psychology departments are struggling to figure out how to provide an effective and systematic course sequence of methods and statistics to students with different levels of learning and previous exposure to the content topics. The UMBC psychology program's new PSYC 310-311, 312 sequences seems to be an appropriate solution for this problem by differentiating between the majority of B.A. students who can gain experience from a 'consumers of research' perspective (PSYC 311) and B.S. students as well as graduate school bound B.A. students (PSYC 312). However, in order to confirm the success of the sequence, it is important to obtain and analyze data about the next career paths (e.g., jobs and graduate schools) of the two groups after they graduate.

- 5) How might we grow and expand the Peer Mentor and Writing Fellows' programs to further improve our pedagogical momentum towards improving undergraduate preparation in writing, critical thinking, and research evaluation/conduct? Which other courses might be included? Please share additional means of providing solid writing, critical thinking, and research training to undergraduates across the degrees.

We did not have sufficient time to analyze data relevant to these programs.

- 6) For all programs and operations, what are your suggestions for enhancing our climate, morale, and curricular foci as they relate to diversity and inclusion?

This was addressed in the main document above.