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Spring 2015

Psychology Discipline Assessment Report 2014/2015

Psychology Discipline

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Psych Assessment Plan F 2014-S 2017

Goals of Major:

The psychology curriculum focuses on understanding scientific methods and applying them to both human and non-human behaviors and mental processes. It provides students with methodological skills, practice in applying these skills, and an introduction to core areas of psychology. The major provides a comprehensive selection of courses that fully prepare students for a wide range of careers and graduate and professional studies.

Learning objectives and outcomes:

The psychology curriculum is designed to ensure that students achieve the following goals:

Goal 1: Knowledge Base in Psychology

- 1.1 Understand the spectrum of psychological phenomena related to behavior and mental processes and how the environment (ranging from biological to sociocultural influences) affect both.
- 1.2 Obtain knowledge of Psychology's main content domains and applications

Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry and Critical thinking

- 2.1 Ability to use scientific reasoning to interpret psychological phenomena
- 2.2 Demonstrate psychology information literacy
- 2.3 Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving
- 2.4 Gain exposure to interpreting, designing, and conducting psychological research
- 2.5 Attain awareness of ethical issues in psychology

Goal 3: Communication

- 3.1 Demonstrate effective writing
- 3.2 Exhibit effective presentation skills
- 3.3 Exhibit effective discussion skills

Goal 4: Information and Technological Literacy

- 4.1 Exposure to psychological statistical packages
- 4.2 Ability to utilize databases related to psychology

Year 1 (2014-2015):

Learning Objective to be Assessed: 3.1 Demonstrate effective writing

In accordance with the recommendations of Walvoord (2010) we used psychology students' senior seminar final papers as a sample of student work completed at the end of their course of study. Each

faculty teaching a senior seminar during the 2014-2015 academic year analyzed their respective students' final papers and found the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a group. Faculty met during spring 15 and August 2015 and discussed these findings and actions to be taken.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, all faculty teaching the senior seminar added the following statement in their syllabus:

"Psychology Discipline Programmatic Assessment: This year the psychology faculty are assessing how well our students are demonstrating effective writing. Each faculty teaching a senior seminar during the 2014-2015 academic year will analyze their respective students' final papers and will find the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a group. During finals week or the week after finals week Spring 2015 all psychology faculty will meet and discuss identified strengths and weaknesses and determine what if any changes need to be made. By being in this course, you are giving your permission for the faculty to use your paper for these assessment purposes. Your anonymous paper may be submitted as evidence of our assessment of this learning objective."

Findings, action item and projected follow-up:

Findings:

Papers were assessed by each of the teaching faculty (6) on the following:

Mechanics, avoiding plagiarism, APA writing format, technical writing style, content and punctuality.

Common Problems:

- Clarity of writing
- Informal word choice (using contractions, speech-like sentence construction, etc.)
- Flow/Organization: writing in an order that makes sense; leading the reader through the arguments
- Lack of strong conclusion or not having a conclusion
- Knowing when to re-cite papers after the initial citation
- Stating things like "Everyone knows..." without a citation.
- Time management/turning in drafts or final paper on time
- Length – many were too short or unfinished at second draft.
- Overstating the conclusions of a paper
- Less Common Problems
- Details – students were occasionally confused by the details of the results they were reporting, so what they wrote didn't make sense.
- Not having a "story" to tell – no clear sense of what the paper is about
- Frequent/inappropriate passive voice
- Old or out-of-date citations
- Using "males and females" instead of "men and women"
- Reporting research results in the present tense
- Citing review papers rather than the original source
- Mentioning author gender

Common positive aspects:

- Selecting appropriate sources
- No or very little plagiarism (none intentional)
- Solid Implications and Future Directions sections
- Identifying relevant literature
- Creating a strong thesis
- Tying information together in unique ways
- Future research implications/suggestions

Disagreement among sections:

- Some instructors found students to be relatively proficient in APA style, others found consistent errors.
- Some instructors found consistent grammar problems, and others reported fewer problems.

Action item: All faculty read John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas* in the summer of 2015 and writing across the discipline was discussed during the fall Psychology retreat in August 2015 (in particular, the goal of preparing students to write their senior seminar was discussed). As a result, the director of the UMM writing center will be evaluating writing across the discipline (by looking at individual writing assignments in individual courses) in spring 16 to determine what we need to do individually and collectively to achieve our goal.

Follow-up: The discipline coordinator will convene a meeting (spring 2016 and/or August 2016) and a discussion of how to implement the suggestions of the Writing Center Coordinator will be discussed and a plan devised and implemented 2016-2017.

Year 2 (2015-2016):

Learning Objective to be Assessed: 3.2 Exhibit effective presentation skills

Faculty agreed at the fall retreat (August 2015) that the quality of student presentations should be addressed. Faculty previously agreed that a rubric should be used in assessing presentations in the senior seminars and a rubric will now be employed to assess the quality of student practice presentations (prior to their public presentation). Each faculty member will:

- 1) use a rubric to evaluate the practice presentation students give before their final, public presentation.
- 2) provide students with feedback on their practice presentations.
- 3) collect data on how well students complete each category of the rubric for their practice presentation.
- 4) collect data on the grades assigned to the final, public presentations.

Action item: Faculty will meet in August of 2016 to discuss the findings and determine which

aspects of presentations we need to provide specific instruction on during 2016-2017.

Follow-up: Faculty will meet in spring of 17 (and August 17) to discuss whether we need 2 years of data to compare to determine whether our focus on feedback during practice presentations has changed presentation quality.

Year 3 (2016-2017):

Learning Objective to be Assessed: 2.2 Demonstrate Psychology information literacy.

Plans to do so to be developed at the Psychology faculty retreat August 2016.