University of
Lethbridge

Office of the Provost and   4401 University Drive   Phone 403.329.2202
Vice-President (Academic)   Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada   Fax 403.329.2097
                              T1K 3M4

TO: Mike Mahon   **DATE:**   April 11, 2019
             President and Vice Chancellor

FROM: Alan Siaroff
             Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Department of Psychology Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality
Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of Psychology at its April 5, 2019 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review comprised John Vokey (Program Review Coordinator) and
Scott Allen.

The review produced four documents:[1]

1.   Self Study Report. Written by Scott Allen and Peter Henzi. Received March 9, 2018.

2.   External Review Report. Written by Marvin Krank (UBC) and Jim Clark (University of Winnipeg),
     based on a site visit on November 1-2, 2018 and received February 7, 2019.

3.   Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 4, 2019.

4.   Dean's Response. Written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Received March
     28, 2019.

---

[1] All documents are available upon request.

Self Study Report

The Self Study Report noted the following weaknesses for the department:

- The department does not provide adequate structure or opportunities for student engagement with the discipline and the department.

- The department does not adequately integrate conceptual and empirical training.

- The department does not adequately cater for students pursuing a B.A. in Psychology.

- The lab space is currently satisfactory, but will become inadequate with the growth of research programs and the hiring of faculty.

- Faculty numbers have stayed static despite a rapid increase in student population, resulting in a departmental student to faculty ratio that is anomalous in Arts and Science.

- The popularity of introductory Psychology classes has made the department less capable of offering higher-level courses for majors.

- The department does not offer standard courses in data acquisition and interpretation.

- With higher student numbers the department has difficulty offering practical experiences to students through Independent and Applied Studies courses.

- There is no sense of cohort identity in the undergraduate program.

The department has developed a revised curriculum that they anticipate will improve the quality of the Psychology major and the student experience, and has proposed the establishment of a Director of Studies to support student engagement and progress.

The following strengths were identified in the body of the report:

- The department is historically strong in evolutionary approaches to psychology and cognition.

- All tenured or tenure track faculty are active in research.

- Overlapping and complementary research competencies give the department a distinctive research profile that offers a range and depth of expertise that is rare for smaller institutions.

- The PSYC 1000 course introduces new students to all faculty members and their research.

- As part of their major, students can take several Independent and/or Applied Studies courses, which allows them to tailor the major to their own interests.

- The number of undergraduate students has risen about 10% in the past ten years.

- The number of graduate students has almost doubled in the last decade, and the proportion of PhD students has been gradually increasing.

In the Self Study the Program Review Committee asked for guidance from the External Reviewers on four broad areas:

1. Are the department's concerns about the undergraduate curriculum justified? Will the proposed curriculum review address these concerns?

2. Can required curricular changes happen without hiring additional faculty? If they can, how can the lack of courses for the B.A. Psychology be addressed? If the changes cannot be implemented without more faculty, what additional faculty are needed? Should the department address the perceived need for applied undergraduate courses, and if so how can this be done given resource constraints?

3. Are there other recommended curricular changes to augment the major?

4. If the lab space cannot be increased, how can the department maintain or increase the quality of graduate training and increase graduate student numbers? How will this affect the next faculty hires?

External Review Report

The External Review Report noted the strengths of the Department of Psychology:

- Student opinions of the department are very favourable.
- There are strong research programs, notably in evolutionary psychology.
- Research programs involve undergraduates as teaching assistants.
- Graduate students provide critical support for undergraduates by acting as teaching assistants and sometimes instructors.
- The department is extremely strong in natural science areas of psychology, especially with an evolutionary perspective.

Weaknesses and challenges for the department include:

- Enrolments have risen while teaching capacity has fallen.
- The department is understaffed, and several faculty are approaching retirement.
- The educational experience is being compromised by overly large classes, inconsistent course offerings, and delays in meeting graduation requirements.
- The format of the introductory psychology course, with lectures by several faculty, means that students are not exposed to the diverse areas of psychology or to a broader overview. In addition, students find it a challenge to be evaluated in slightly different ways by different faculty.
- The introductory classes in psychology are particularly large for a primarily undergraduate university.
- The requirement for students to take introductory psychology plus six courses before taking upper level courses can limit student options in the first two years.
- Some students need more exposure to more sophisticated analytical methods for analyzing data from quasi-experimental or epidemiological designs.
- The department offers an excessive number of independent and applied studies courses.
- The lack of a structured Honours program disadvantages students who seek admission to clinical programs.
- Teaching Assistant funding is controlled by the School of Graduate Studies.
- There are some students in upper-year courses that lack the appropriate prerequisites.

The report contained the following main recommendations:

1. Increase the faculty complement by three to four faculty members.
2. Restore funding for sessional instructors, especially for cost recovery classes.
3. Develop a process for succession planning.
4. Focus new hires in the areas of human development, social cognition, personality, and abnormal psychology.
5. Provide support to the department to ensure its designated space in the new science and academic building has the appropriate equipment, Teaching Assistant complement, and other resources to manage the labs effectively.
6. Review the introductory psychology course to see how to add a more comprehensive overview. Consider a blended approach that keeps the individual faculty lectures but adds comprehensive summary material.

7. Add structure and consistent delivery for the second year courses. Regarding structure, continue with the departmental proposal that psychology majors all take a required set of six half courses, one in statistics and methods (2030), and the rest in the areas of: developmental (2110), learning and cognition (2330), behaviour and evolution (2700), social (2800), and neuroscience (Neuroscience 2600). Consider also developing a menu of courses from which students can select a minimum number before registering for upper level classes.

8. Add flexibility to the prerequisite structure for advanced courses.

9. Add an experiential lab course to the program.

10. Add advanced psychology courses that are geared towards the academic and career objectives of psychology majors. Courses in, for example, human development, social cognition, personality, and abnormal psychology.

11. Review statistics offerings to consider exposing students to more sophisticated data analytic methods.

12. Reduce the department's reliance on independent and applied studies courses.

13. Consider developing a structured Honours program.

14. Consider developing co-op options.

15. Determine the priorities for course offerings and communicate scheduled offerings effectively to students. (Some courses can be offered one or more times a year, others less frequently, and others only occasionally.)

16. Link some Teaching Assistant funding to undergraduate programming needs.

17. Develop an enhanced prerequisite check system to decrease the number of under-prepared students in advanced courses who don't have prerequisite waivers.

18. Consider engaging an external leader with a broad perspective on psychology to facilitate a group of faculty in developing future directions for program development.

Some additional recommendations were noted in the body of the report:

*   Review and revise the content and structure of the curriculum in accordance with disciplinary standards. Areas that require particular attention include: the format of introductory psychology; the content of the second-year statistics and methods course; how to increase the practical components, such as lab experiences; and how to address the lack of ready availability of required courses and prerequisites.

*   The reviewers support the department proposal that all majors take a six required courses: one in statistics and methods; and one each in the areas of developmental, learning and cognition, behaviour and evolution, social, and neuroscience.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee noted that the Department of Psychology has begun action on some of the recommendations:

*   The Department has developed a committee to review and adjust the prerequisites for 3000-level courses, and to require an appropriate subset of 2000-level courses for each 3000-level course. This committee will also explore the clarification of the 2000-level requirements for the major. (Recommendation 8 above.)

*   The Department has begun discussions on changes to the introductory psychology course so it provides a more comprehensive overview of psychology as a discipline. (Recommendation 6 above.)

*   The Department is not opposed to the idea of hiring a potential Chair externally but this may not be feasible given current fiscal realities. There is a Departmental consensus building regarding an internal Chair. (Recommendation 18 above.)

Most of the recommendations have resource implications. For example: mounting lab courses will require additional resources (recommendation 5 above); and adding further senior-level courses (recommendation 10 above) will not be possible without an increase in faculty complement (recommendation 1).

Some recommendations (e.g., 13 and 16) involve administrative issues at the institutional level and so the Department has to discuss these with the Dean, the VPA, and others.

Dean's Response

The Dean's response addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

Recommendation:	Response:
1. Increase the faculty complement by three to four faculty members. 2. Restore funding for sessional instructors, especially for cost recovery classes. 3. Develop a process for succession planning. 4. Focus new hires in the areas of human development, social cognition, personality, and abnormal psychology.	Adding new positions will be extremely difficult given financial constraints. More sessionals could be added in the short term. But new hires in Psychology would have to be made at the expense of other units in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Regardless, succession planning should be done. This should include what areas replacement hires should be made in.
6. Review the introductory psychology course to see how to add a more comprehensive overview. Consider a blended approach that keeps the individual faculty lectures but adds comprehensive summary material.	Agreed.
7. Add structure and consistent delivery for the second year courses. Regarding structure, continue with the departmental proposal that psychology majors all take a required set of six half courses, one in statistics and methods (2030), and the rest in the areas of: developmental (2110), learning and cognition (2330), behaviour and evolution (2700), social (2800), and neuroscience (Neuroscience 2600). Consider also developing a menu of courses from which students can select a minimum number before registering for upper level classes.	Agreed, as long as flexibility and options for students are not reduced. The option of developing a menu of courses is supported by the Dean.
8. Add flexibility to the prerequisite structure for advanced courses.	Agreed. This should also apply to the upper-year courses that have many prerequisites.
9. Add an experiential lab course to the program.	Agreed, but this is contingent upon resources being available.
10. Add advanced psychology courses that are geared towards the academic and career objectives of psychology majors. Courses in, for example, human development, social cognition, personality, and abnormal psychology.	Agreed, but this is contingent upon resources.

Recommendation:	Response:
11. Review statistics offerings to consider exposing students to more sophisticated data analytic methods.	Agreed, as part of a broader curriculum review.
12. Reduce the department's reliance on independent and applied studies courses.	This might happen as series courses become regularized, but some faculty value independent studies.
13. Consider developing a structured Honours program.	Adding an Honours Program to undergraduate degrees would have to be done at the institutional level. The Department could review their regulations for the Honours Thesis.
14. Consider developing co-op options.	Agreed. The Department should work with the Co-Op Office.
15. Determine the priorities for course offerings and communicate scheduled offerings effectively to students. (Some courses can be offered one or more times a year, others less frequently, and others only occasionally.)	The move to full-year timetabling will help in this area. The Department could create their own course cycling plan.
16. Link some Teaching Assistant funding to undergraduate programming needs.	Agreed. Use graduate TAs to run labs and explore other ways to use graduate students to enhance the undergraduate experience.
17. Develop an enhanced prerequisite check system to decrease the number of under-prepared students in advanced courses who don't have prerequisite waivers.	Review all prerequisites for the curriculum review.
18. Consider engaging an external leader with a broad perspective on psychology to facilitate a group of faculty in developing future directions for program development.	This may not be necessary, as noted in the Program Response.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of Psychology academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

Alan Siaroff

Alan Siaroff

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)