



FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY (BA)

Program Learning Assessment

2011-2015 Assessment Planning Cycle Key Findings and Proposed Actions

October 1, 2015

Acknowledgments

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Forensic Psychology (BA)

Mission and Learning Objectives

The mission of the Forensic Psychology major is to enhance understanding of behavior, in terms of its biological, cognitive, social, emotional and contextual components and their interaction, and to develop an appreciation for its implications in forensic settings. Students will learn to employ a scientific approach to understand behavior.

The Psychology Department has developed a series of learning objectives (adapted from those of the American Psychological Association (APA) “area’s” of learning) that reflect “optimal expectations for performance at the completion of the baccalaureate degree by students who major in psychology” (APA, 2007, p. v)¹. The first five objectives include development of knowledge, skills, and values consistent with the science and application of Psychology, which are thought to be the responsibility of the psychology program. The final five objectives reflect knowledge, skills, and values consistent with liberal arts education that are further developed in psychology. These are thought to be developed (and assessed) across domains – both in the major as well as through general education.

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the historical and theoretical foundations of psychology, as well as key concepts, content, and research methods in the major sub-disciplines of psychology and in the field of “psychology and the law”. [Areas #1, 4]
- Demonstrate appropriate information literacy, including the ability to perform effective database searches. [Area #6]
- Demonstrate the ability to design an ethically appropriate psychological research study and analyze and interpret basic research data. [Areas #2, 3, 5]
- Gather, read, synthesize and critique primary source psychological and psycho-legal literature. [Areas #3, 6, 7]
- Communicate effectively through oral and written presentations and demonstrate appropriate use of APA style. [Area #7]
- Critically and skeptically evaluate psychological information and extend this critical thinking to one’s own work and all aspects of life-long learning. [Areas #3, 4, 9]
- Demonstrate an appreciation of contextual influences on individual behavior and diversity of perspectives, including those related to race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality and culture. [Area #8]
- Recognize professional ethics inherent in different aspects of psychology, including forensic psychology. [Areas #5, 8]
- Demonstrate an appreciation of how psychology relates to real-life professional and personal situations. [Areas #4, 9]
- Demonstrate an awareness of the scope and entry qualifications of professional and graduate programs in psychology. [Area #10]

¹ American Psychological Association. (2007). *APA guidelines for the undergraduate psychology major*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from www.apa.org/ed/resources.html

Assessment Philosophy

Context

The departmental self-study conducted by the Psychology Department in 2000 highlighted the serious need for revisions to the existing Forensic Psychology major. During the past several years, the major was revised and a new major put in place – to begin the 2011-2012 academic year.

The department's assessment strategy to date has been somewhat restrained, due to the coming shift in the program requirements and expected outcomes. Our old major, for example, involved less actual psychology content than is appropriate for a functional psychology major intended to meet the learning objectives of a psychology major. However, during the 2010-2011 academic year, we began to assess some of our core courses that will remain between the old and the new program (i.e., Psy 101 Introduction to Psychology, 200 Cognitive Psychology, 242 Abnormal Psychology and capstone 476 in spring).

In addition, tied to our newly proposed major was a pedagogical change that could, arguably, impact student learning and success at meeting our program's learning goals. Specifically – we began to teach large sections of several of our courses (e.g., 300, 150, 120, and 80-student sections) with either recitation sections or Graduate Teaching Assistants. Hence, in addition to assessing student success at meeting learning objectives for individual courses and for the major – we have assessed the impact of class size on students' performance in meeting those objectives.

Philosophy

The goal of outcomes assessment is to continuously improve both the teaching and learning experiences in our major. The goal of our assessment strategy is to address all ten learning objectives over time, through direct and indirect means.

The newly revised Forensic Psychology major focuses on meeting the stated learning objectives of the Forensic Psychology major. Our assessment program is designed to provide appropriate data to allow us to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in our new major and the degree to which we are meeting our objectives. Results from our assessments will be used to refine our major, our learning objectives (particularly for individual courses), our requirements at different points in the curriculum, our standards and our teaching.

Assessment Cycle Review

The Forensic Psychology Major was completely revamped prior to this assessment cycle. In designing our assessment plan for our new major, we adopted the learning objectives prescribed by the American Psychological Association (APA) for all Psychology majors. This decision proved to be the largest stumbling block in executing our assessment plan. Put simply, testing 43 specific learning objectives across 10 general learning areas was an impossible task given the personnel, time and logistical constraints within our department. Indeed, we were clearly not alone in this feeling. In the middle of the cycle, APA issued a more streamlined—significantly condensed—set of learning objectives. Moreover, our early assessment efforts gave us a better understanding of exactly what we wanted our students to be doing at each level of the major. We are working on adapting the APAs new goals—now that we have a better idea of our student's scaffolding needs—and will adopt a new assessment plan in 2016.

Nonetheless, despite the unwieldy goals we had set for ourselves, we made a great deal of progress and have learned a lot about how assessment should work in our department, frequently

through trial and error. The first important decision was to focus on the core required, courses in the Major (and not the large number of electives). We have approximately 2000 majors, thus it was also important to decide whether all students should be assessed on any given objective or whether sampling methods should be implemented. On this point, we have tried it both ways and believe that the decision must, in the end, be decided by logistical concerns. We also faced significant difficulties getting faculty invested in the process. This difficulty is largely a function of the number of programs our department offers; not all faculty teach in the undergraduate curriculum, thus finding time to focus on assessment in faculty meetings was often difficult. Moreover, we have struggled with more structural concerns over whether assessment should be undertaken by a single person (a Deputy Chair, for example, who receives course releases), a committee, or the individual professors. While we ultimately decided on a committee-based approach, we are still working on that committee's purview (i.e., is it separate from the Curriculum Committee). However, we do now have a standard set of learning outcomes for each course in the major (critical with so many adjuncts teaching for us). While they will also need to be altered, given the new assessment plan, the process should be significantly easier this time round.

Overall, our assessment decisions were rather haphazard during this cycle and we worked hard as it came to a close to devise a workable and scientific approach. For example, our assessment of students' knowledge of key concepts in specific content areas was largely determined by end-of-semester multiple-choice tests that were devised by the faculty teaching the relevant content courses. Of course, a more scientific approach might be to implement pre (beginning) v. post (end) course quizzes. In addition, we also had a mandate to determine whether student outcomes differed as a function of class size, which absorbed a lot of our early efforts. Putting those issues aside, the inaugural assessment plan was devised to assess the capstone classes first, followed by the core courses at the 200-level (Abnormal, Social, Cognitive and Developmental). We quickly realized there were significant deficits at the capstone level and worked to implement changes in the core courses that would better reflect the development of research and evaluation skills.

For example, in Psy311-Research Methods we observed that students were performing exceptionally well on objectives related to designing a research project. However, they struggled to conduct an adequate literature review of a psychology topic, and to understand and summarize a single research article. Critically, they struggled to interpret and generalize from the results they observed. In an attempt to improve these skills we worked on the foundational courses. For example in Psy200-Cognitive Psychology, over several semesters we developed a new approach to the standard "article critique" writing assignment. Students were provided with a rubric that detailed the requirements and emphasized how each entry on the rubric fitted with the learning outcomes of the Major. The assignment was further broken down into smaller components to give students time to develop the skills over the course of the semester via extensive written and oral feedback. These changes were welcomed by students and were beginning to show positive outcomes at the end of the cycle. Of course, as is true across the College, we also observed significant writing problems (from grammar to more conceptual issues) at every level. We employ Writing Fellows (from the Graduate Center) in some of our courses in an attempt to combat some of these problems; however, we recognize that that cannot be a long-term solution given financial constraints.

We believe the next cycle will be significantly easier and yield improvements in our assessment approach and ultimately, ability to teach and mentor our majors. We want to chart student progress through the major and consider whether the revisions we have made thus far to

our assignments are yielding better outcomes. We will continue to develop new assessment tools that will increase our understanding of student learning and progress through our major and hope that a more streamlined approach will prove more welcoming to increased faculty involvement.

Forensic Psychology (BA)

Program Learning Assessment. Key findings and proposed actions
(2011-2015)

Program Learning Goals

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Area: Knowledge base of psychology. 2. Area: Basic research knowledge and skills. 3. Area: Critical thinking skills. 4. Area: Application of psychology. 5. Area: Ethics and values. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Area: Information and technology literacy. 7. Area: Communication skills. 8. Area: Awareness and respect for diversity. 9. Area: Personal development. 10. Area: Career planning and development. |
|---|--|

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed ¹	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
Fall 2010				
Assessment Context² : PSY 101 Large Class vs. Small Class vs. Learning Community, Tool³ : Common Test				
		ANOVA conducted on class size/format revealed no significant difference in mean percentage <i>incorrect</i> for each test question as a result of Large Class (40%), Small Class (36%) or Learning Community (32%) teaching format.	Discuss refinements to both the assessment tool and the method of administration for the next assessment cycle.	
Assessment Context² : PSY 200 Large Class vs. Small Class, Tool³ : Common Test				
		ANOVA conducted on class size revealed no significant difference in mean percentage <i>incorrect</i> for each test question as a result of Large (23%) or Small (25%) class size.	In response to concern by adjunct faculty about the use of assessment findings, we will run a corresponding PR campaign, clearly articulating the goals of assessing student learning outcomes.	
Assessment Context² : PSY 242 Large Class vs. Small Class, Tool³ : Common Test				
		ANOVA conducted on class size revealed no significant difference in mean percentage <i>incorrect</i> for each test question as a result of Large (22%) or Small (24%) class size.		

(1) Percent represents ratio of students who met or exceeded expectations. Where scores represent mean performance, the mean score and highest scale value are indicated (e.g., 3.3 of 4). (2) Assessment context may relate to comprehensive program review, specific academic setting (e.g., course #, capstone, internship), class standing (e.g., seniors, transfers, alumni), post-graduation outcomes (e.g., placement, further education, employers ratings of employee skills), or indicators of learning progress. (3) Examples of tools include exams, portfolios, research projects, lab reports, papers, essays, surveys, licensure tests, performances, presentations. (4) Re-assessment of learning follows the implementation of actions to determine their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed		
2011						
Assessment Context² : Capstone - PSY 476 (n=14), Tool³ : Paper						
2	21	Sample reduced due to diversity of assignments. Majority of students scoring in the 'rudimentary' or 'developing' categories for each of the learning goals. However, the rubric has a 'professional standard.' No real relationship between grades and assessment according to the rubric.	A model whereby professors teaching each course are responsible for developing assessment plans and materials, evaluating assessments, and proposing corrective actions. Wider discussion on department's expectations for a capstone. Improve communication to all faculty on expectations for each of our courses.			
3	14					
7	36					
7	14					
7	50					
2012						
Assessment Context² : PSY 311 (n=37), Tool³ : Paper						
2	6	Majority of students are either failing to meet or only approaching the learning goals. In addition, little overlap between how professors graded a paper and whether students demonstrated a good grasp of the learning goals that the assignment was designed to test.	Discuss changes to assessment structure, such as getting feedback throughout the course (F12).	2013	50	↑
5	11					
6	30					
7	4					
Assessment Context² : Graduating Seniors (n=30), Tool³ : Survey						
5		Students comfortable with training in the areas of ethics and values, personal development, career options, and preparation for graduate school. Perceptions don't match reality, as seen with PSY 311 assessment. Hopeful there will be no disconnect once students begin to complete our new curriculum.				
9						
10						
2013						
Assessment Context² : PSY 221, Tool³ : Multiple Choice Test						
1		The major limitation of 221 assessment was the non-uniform administration of the assessment items. No professor administered all of the items and one of the professors administered them in a context significantly different from the others. We observed a large difference in performance between the small (adjunct) and large (full-time) classes, favoring the large lecture class taught by the tenured professor.	Sort common exam so it directly maps onto the learning outcomes; create a set of specific instructions for pre- and post-course administration of the test (F13).			

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2013 (cont.)				
Assessment Context² : PSY 231 (n=140), Tool³ : Multiple Choice Test				
1		Sample not representative of all students. Students with As and Bs in the course didn't take the test. Treated each question as the unit of analysis and percent correct as score. When meeting expectations set at 80% of students getting it right, the results are severely disappointing. Only 1 question achieved this goal. When we set meeting expectations at 65% of students getting a question correct, we still are only able to claim success on 7 out of 31 questions.	Reconsider the questions in the assessment and the way they are written to ensure that all professors teaching the course agree that it is set at an appropriate level. Map exam to learning outcomes; create specific instructions for pre and post course administration of the test (F13).	
Assessment Context² : PSY 311 (n=37), Tool³ : Research Paper				
2	50	Students did exceptionally well on the basic design of a research project. However, they continue to struggle to conduct an adequate review of a specific area of psychology, and to understand and summarize a research article. Importantly, students continued to struggle to interpret and generalize from the results they had in this particular assignment.	Meet with 311 professors to discuss the feedback from the current assessment and push for a more basic topic for the major research project (F13).	
6	46			
2015				
Assessment Context² : PSY 200, 242 (n=383), Tool³ : Multiple Choice Test				
2	82	On each of the learning objectives, majority of students were considered to be at the meets or exceeds expectations, particularly on the outcomes considered critical for this level of the major (psycinfo, apa style). Scaffolding in our Major is beginning to show an effect. Nevertheless, 33% of students failed the APA style standard. Students were vocal in their appreciation that they could see the grander purpose of the assessment.	Create the "grand rubric" (adjusted for course level) for all appropriate learning objectives so that all faculty can pull the objectives relevant to their course assignments (F15).	
4	69		Recommend to all professors that they identify in their course materials how each piece of course assessment addresses the specific learning objectives for the course and how those objectives fit with the major (F15).	