

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
ASSESSMENT PLAN
Updated: March 2012

The *Mission* of the Department of Psychology is to provide a comprehensive undergraduate education in Psychology to its majors, expose interested non-majors to the discipline of psychology, and offer courses that support the College Core Curriculum and programs in other majors. Students are required to sample from a variety of core courses that span the discipline of psychology and to acquire a firm foundation in research methods and data analysis. Qualified students are able to apply their content knowledge, research and clinical skills through internship and independent study.

A. Student Learning Outcomes

The department has identified the following major student learning outcomes that are informed by the guidelines from the American Psychological Association (<http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.pdf>) and consistent with the university's *Vision Statement*:

Graduates from the Psychology Department are expected to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.
2. Understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
3. Demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and technology for many purposes.
4. Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills:
 - a) professional writing conventions (e.g., grammar, audience awareness, formality) appropriate to purpose and context and effective use of APA style for empirically based reports and literature reviews
 - b) effectively use oral communication skills for various purposes (e.g., informing, defending, explaining, persuading, arguing, teaching) across various formats (e.g., group discussion, debate, lecture).
5. Engage in critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry and when possible, use the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.

2. Descriptions of methods

The department uses a variety of different methods and tools to assess the above learning goals. The three courses we most typically use for assessment of student learning are: Introduction to Psychology (both our majors-only section and other sections), Psychology Laboratory, and our Theoretical Thinking (capstone) courses. This range of courses allows for comparison of lower level and upper level students. We use a variety of quantitative surveys to assess student learning directly or student perceptions of learning and/or opportunities to reach various student learning goals. We have developed and/or utilized all of the following surveys:

- a) Psychology Social Science Learning Outcomes (PSSLO)- a content exam for major concepts, theoretical perspectives, etc. in the field of psychology (a direct measure of SLOs 1 and 2)
- b) A Technology Survey- a measure of students' perceptions of competencies with various forms of educational technology (an indirect measure of SLO 3)
- c) Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) (a direct measure of SLO 3)
- d) College of Mount St. Joseph's Psychological Critical Thinking Exam (a direct measure of SLO 5)
- e) Communication Skills Assessment-a tool for measuring student perceptions of oral and written communications competencies as well as opportunities for acquiring such competencies (an indirect measure of 4)
- f) Senior Exit Survey (an indirect measure)

3. Timeline & Assignments of responsibility

At a department meeting early in the fall semester, the chair of the assessment committee reports on results from the previous year's assessment and consults with the faculty to determine priorities and methodologies for the current year's assessment. The Assessment Committee works closely with the Chair to finalize the plan for the year. Instructors of the relevant course categories contribute as needed. In general, we assess one goal per year in a cyclic fashion. We have also assessed the same goal, several years in a row, in an effort to acquire sufficient information for closing the loop. Data are typically collected and analyzed in the spring semester.

4. Record keeping

Data summaries and interpretations are reported to the Dean through the Annual Assessment Report, a component of the Departmental Annual Report. Raw data, assessment tools, reports, and all other relevant records are stored in an assessment folder on the department ANGEL site.

5. Processes for using assessment results

The department discusses the results of the assessment conducted in the previous academic year and any other recommendations for improving the program at the first department meeting in the fall semester. The assessment committee works closely with the curriculum committee to consider ways to make data-informed adjustments to the curriculum.

Examples of recent changes based on assessment results:

1. Through our assessment of student perceptions of advising, we instituted several different tracks for our majors (e.g., School/Child, Forensic, Counseling & Health, Biopsychology/Cognitive Neuroscience).
2. We also recently developed our Bachelor of Science degree, based on student demand.
3. We have tried to synchronize our Psychology Laboratory course (PSY 130) with our Introduction to Psychology course (PSY 129), primarily through developing a section of Introduction to Psychology for majors only (all of whom are potentially placed in specific sections of lab).
4. We have also elaborated on guidelines for faculty teaching Introduction to Psychology, based on a systematic evaluation of course syllabi (e.g., writing, critical thinking, coverage of methodology).

Goals for student learning outcome assessment:

1. Update the technology survey.
2. Utilize a major field test in psychology to assess content and compare results with our self-designed content measure (PSSLO).
3. Work toward using a shared rubric to directly assess students' mastery of critical thinking, content, and writing skills.
4. Re-evaluate the courses in the capstone and discuss shared expectations for both student learning and assessment in this course.