

Academic Assessment Plan 2003
Department of Psychology
Prepared by Robert Stewart 12/15/2004

Oakland University Mission: Goals relevant to the Department of Psychology Assessment Plan

Oakland University “emphasizes four essential ingredients for [its] direction: excellent and relevant instruction, high quality basic and applied research and scholarship, responsive and effective public and community service, and a comprehensive schedule of student development activities” (2004-2005 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 8). The “essential ingredients” of our mission for Oakland University students generate goals for academic programs. Toward this end, The Department of Psychology endorsed the following aspects of the university mission as guidelines for our program.

1. **Instruction:** At Oakland University, “program[s] provides a variety of courses and curricular experiences to ensure an enriched academic life along with superior career preparation or enhancement.” Emphasis is on “the development of essential “skills, knowledge, and attitudes for active concerned citizenship.” The programs at Oakland University prepare “students for post-baccalaureate education, professional schools, or careers directly after graduation.”
2. **Research and scholarship:** As endorsed by the mission of the university, that is, “Oakland University assumes an obligation to advance knowledge through the research and scholarship of its faculty and students” by directly involving students in research endeavors with faculty or indirectly through the integration of research and scholarship through instruction.
3. **Student development:** The department endorses Oakland University’s mission “to facilitate the development of those personal skills which will contribute to informed decision making and productive citizenship.”

OU General Education Program: Goals relevant to the Department of Psychology Assessment Plan

General education is central to the undergraduate experience of our students, touching the lives of Oakland graduates and helping to shape their future. The General Education program was in a process of review and revision as the Department of Psychology was developing its assessment plan. The learning objectives listed below certainly influenced this process:

1. **Formal Reasoning:** The student will demonstrate:
 - knowledge of one or more formal reasoning systems such as computer programming, mathematics, statistics, linguistics or logic
 - application of formal reasoning to read, understand, model and solve problems across a variety of applications
2. **Writing:** The student will demonstrate
 - knowledge of the elements, writing processes, and organizing strategies for creating analytical and expository prose
 - effective rhetorical strategies appropriate to the topic, audience, context, and purpose
3. **Knowledge Exploration Area, Social Science:** The student will demonstrate
 - knowledge of concepts, methods and theories designed to enhance understanding of human behavior and/or societies

- application of concepts and theories to problems involving individuals, institutions, or nations
4. **Capstone Experience: The student will demonstrate:**
- appropriate uses of a variety of methods of inquiry and a recognition of ethical considerations that arise
 - the ability to integrate the knowledge learned in general education and its relevance to the student's life and career

Goals of the Department of Psychology Assessment Plan

The American Psychological Association sponsored a task force to conduct a formal study of the learning goals and objectives for the undergraduate psychology major. The task force report, adopted by the APA Board of Educational Affairs in March of 2002, outlines 10 goals and provided a wide variety of student learning outcomes that represent “reasonable departmental expectations for the undergraduate psychology major across educational contexts.” The goals are divided into two major categories: [1] knowledge, skills and values consistent with the science and application of psychology; and [2] knowledge, skills and values consistent with the liberal arts education that are further developed in psychology. On September 25, 2003, the Department of Psychology unanimously accepted these guidelines as its own assessment plan. The 10 departmental goals and student learning objectives currently associated with each are summarized below.

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.
 - a. Characterize the nature of psychology as a discipline.
 - b. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding representing appropriate breadth and depth in selected content areas of psychology: theory and research representing general domains, the history of psychology, relevant levels of analysis, overarching themes, and relevant ethical issues.
 - c. Use the concepts, language, and major theories of the discipline to account for psychological phenomenon
2. Understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
 - a. Characterize the nature of psychology as a discipline.
 - b. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding representing appropriate breadth and depth in selected content areas of psychology: theory and research representing general domains, the history of psychology, relevant levels of analysis, overarching themes, and relevant ethical issues.
 - c. Explain different research methods used by psychologists.
 - d. Evaluate the appropriateness of conclusions derived from psychological research.
 - e. Generalize research conclusions appropriately based on the parameters of particular research methods
3. Respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.
 - a. Use critical thinking effectively
 - b. Use reasoning to recognize, develop, defend, and criticize arguments and other persuasive appeals.

4. Understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.
 - a. Describe major applied areas of psychology (e.g., clinical, counseling, industrial/organizational, school, health)
 - b. Identify appropriate applications of psychology in solving problems such as the origins and treatment of abnormal behavior, tests and measurement, psychology-based interventions.
5. Value empirical evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a science.
 - a. Recognize the necessity for ethical behavior in all aspects of the science and practice of psychology.
 - b. Seek and evaluate scientific evidence for psychological claims.
 - c. Tolerate ambiguity and realize that psychological explanations are often complex and tentative.
 - d. Recognize and respect human diversity and understanding that psychological explanations may vary across populations and contexts.
6. Demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes.
 - a. Demonstrate information competence at each stage in the following process: formulating a researchable topic, choosing relevant and evaluating relevant resources, and reading and accurately summarizing scientific literature that can be supported by database search strategies
 - b. Use appropriate software to produce understandable reports of the psychological literature, methods, and statistical and qualitative analyses in APA or other appropriate style, including graphic representations of data
7. Communicate effectively in a variety of formats.
 - a. Demonstrate effective writing skills in various formats (e.g., essays, correspondence, technical papers, note taking) for various purposes (e.g., informing, defending, explaining, persuading, arguing, teaching)
 - b. Demonstrate effective oral communication skills in various formats (e.g., group discussion, debate, lecture) and for various purposes (e.g., informing, defending, explaining, persuading, arguing, teaching)
8. Recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity.
 - a. Examine the sociocultural and international contexts that influence individual differences.
 - b. Explain how individual differences influence beliefs, values, and interactions with others and vice versa
9. Develop insight into their own and other's behavior and mental processes and apply effective strategies for self-management and self-improvement.
 - a. Reflect on their experiences to find meaning in them
 - b. Apply psychological principles to promote personal development.
10. Pursue realistic ideas about how to implement their psychological knowledge, skills, and values in occupational pursuits in a variety of settings.
 - a. Apply knowledge of psychology (e.g., decision strategies, life span issues, psychological assessment, types of psychological careers) to formulating career choices.
 - b. Identify the types of academic experience and performance in psychology and the liberal arts that will facilitate entry into the work force, post-baccalaureate education, or both.

Methods and Process of Assessment

A quality assessment plan needs to evolve, and in evolving, it reveals not only areas for curriculum revision, but also new means of assessment. We can not address all 10 of the departmental goals, nor all 26 of the student learning objectives, with comparable levels of depth. Therefore, we have opted to focus attention on various subsets of the goals and objectives while others will remain, for the time being, explored to a less rigorous degree. The Assessment Plan for the Department of Psychology currently possesses four distinct areas of measurement:

1. Direct assessment of student learning in PSY 100
 - Focus on student learning objectives 1a and 1b
2. Direct assessment of student competence in writing intensive courses
 - Focus on student learning objectives 1c, 2d, 2e, 3a, 3b, 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b
3. Direct assessment of student competence in capstone courses
 - Focus on student learning objectives 3a, 3b, 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b
4. Indirect assessment of student attitude via survey
 - Focus on all 10 departmental goals at a molar level

The overall new assessment plan is summarized in Figure 1. At the center of the figure, you will see that all members of the department are involved in the assessment process. The Assessment Committee is charged with planning and conducting assessments and with submitting annual reports to the department summarizing these activities. The Executive and Curriculum committees will determine how these data will be utilized to improve the overall program. Surrounding the central part of the figure you will see four different domains or areas of assessment: Foundation Courses, Knowledge of Psychology, Capstone Courses, and Student Opinion surveys. It is our initial plan that exit surveys of graduating seniors be conducted with every graduation cycle, and that *evaluations* in the other domains be conducted in a rotating three-year cycle. Specifically, although data will be obtained in each of the areas every year the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of these data will rotate on a three-year cycle. This rotation will provide time for the members of the department to focus on the data from any one domain, and to propose and implement modifications if any are warranted before that area is assessed again.

In the following sections the process used by the member of the Department of Psychology to develop and pilot test the instruments in our Assessment Plan will be summarized.

Direct Assessment of Student Learning in PSY 100

- Analysis of results from previous Psychology Assessment Test (PAT) revealed large between section differences in student performance. The chair investigated this situation and discovered the following:
 - Different text books were used in each section, with each instructor assigning and/or covering different topics.
 - The commonality and differences of topic coverage across sections was identified.
 - The chair noted the PAT was designed by one faculty member who did not teach PSY 100. Its content was not known by those teaching PSY 100. Further analysis of PAT results revealed that students scored higher on sections of the PAT if their professor had covered (actively lectured on) this material in class.

- Given these findings, the chair convened the faculty in the Fall of 1999 and informed them that a thorough review of the content and objectives for PSY 100, and the assessment procedure used to evaluate this course would need to be reviewed.
 - The faculty reviewed the syllabi and course objectives for PSY 100 and developed a set of guidelines for the course. Some faculty refused to take part in this process and instead asked not to be assigned to teach this course in the future.
 - In addition to standardizing a large portion of the course content, the faculty agreed to uniformly require web-based quizzes, a comparable grading criterion, and a standard textbook for all sections of PSY 100. These critical revisions were unanimously adopted by the department on October 4, 2001.
 - One year later the method of teaching the course was thoroughly revised as we shifted from a requirement of specific chapters to one of specific modules of material. [Note: A typical introductory psychology book will have 15 to 17 chapters on various topics. A newer method of presentation involves selecting from among 55 smaller modules of material. Shifting to this approach afforded us the opportunity to fine-tune the selection of required material for PSY 100.]
 - The core of faculty who teach PSY 100 then focused on how they would assess student learning of the agreed upon topics that would be common to all PSY 100.
 - Professor Shantz surveyed the faculty to assess their opinions concerning the desired depth of coverage in specific topics, and used this information to construct five (5) versions of a new assessment instrument for PSY 100.
 - Professor Eberly convened the PSY 100 instructors (Professor Shantz was on leave) and conducted a detailed content analysis of these five (5) tests. This group modified the wording of some items on the tests and derived a single test of 100 items. (The other four versions will be integrated into the assessment pool as item-by-item equivalence can be established empirically.)
 - A single assessment instrument has been adopted and will be used as a comprehensive final in all sections of PSY 100 starting with the Fall 2004 semester.
 - Professor Eberly will conduct data analyses during the month of January 2005 to ascertain student learning across sections on each of the major topics identified by the department as crucial to PSY 100 core content.
- The Psychology Assessment Committee and the instructors of PSY 100 will convene on regular intervals to evaluate these results and propose means to enhance student learning where necessary.
- Details of the departmental agreement concerning course content and process can be in Appendix A.

Direct Assessment of Student Products in Writing Intensive Courses

- In the Fall of 2004 the Departmental Curriculum Committee was given the task of reviewing the objectives, practices and outcomes of instruction in the 300-level content courses in Psychology. The committee was specifically charged with the task of determining if these courses could or should be modified so as to satisfy the “writing intensive” requirements of the new General Education program.
 - Professor Lilliston, chair of the Curriculum Committee, brought a motion to the department indicating that all 300-level psychology courses (with the exception of PSY 399 which is counted among the capstone courses) must include a writing component to meet the General Education requirements for writing intensive classes.

- Discussion of this motion prompted in the Assessment Committee to develop a rubric for assessing written products from these courses.
- On October 21, 2004 the motion was unanimously endorsed with the understanding that all faculty teaching 300-level courses would include intensive writing projects in their Fall 2005 classes.
- A detailed summary of the recommendations for writing intensive courses and a copy of the assessment rubric can be found in Appendix B.

Direct Assessment of Student Products in Capstone Courses

- In the Fall of 2002 the Departmental Curriculum Committee was given the task of reviewing the objectives, practices and outcomes of a range of upper-division “capstone” courses in Psychology. These include PSY 399, Field Experience; PSY 470, College Apprentice Teaching; PSY 483-485, Readings and Research Projects; PSY 487-489, Research Apprenticeships, and PSY 494, Honors Independent Studies.
 - Professor Shantz presented a final report and recommendations from this committee in November of 2003, and, after considerable discussion, the recommendations were unanimously endorsed on February 12, 2004.
 - The recommendations provided detailed descriptions of the expectations of students and faculty engaged in these activities, thus providing clearer guidelines to both groups.
 - These recommendations have been included in the “Psychology Operations Manual” distributed to all regular and part-time faculty members at the beginning of each academic year, and have been distributed to students through the departmental website and other advising materials.
- A detailed summary of the recommendations for these capstone courses can be found in the document entitled “What should one expect from a PSY 399, 470, 483-485, or 494 experience?” presented in Appendix C. The rubric used to assess written products in the 300-level courses will be used to assess written capstone projects.

Indirect Measure of Student Opinions via Surveys of Graduates

- Professor McGinnis assumed the responsibility of coordinating the efforts necessary to prepare a web-based survey of students who appear on the four graduation lists reviewed each year.
 - This survey includes a combination of fixed and open-ended responses addressing the major curricular objectives identified by the APA Task Force and endorsed by the members of the department.
 - A number of the primary goals listed by the APA (in particular, the last three) do not fall within the domain of a single course or even a capstone experience. Moreover, some of these items contain wording that make assessment difficult until one operationalizes terms such as “pursue realistic goals,” “develop insight,” or “tolerate ambiguity.” The departmental plan is to start assessment of these goals at a molar level, and move to a more molecular analysis as other assessment activities become more established. Based on data obtained in these initial moral assessments of student attitude, assessment committees in the future will devise measures to explore specific topics within these objectives as necessary.

- The survey was used for the first time in May and June of 2004 to obtain data from December 2003 and April 2004 graduates. Surveys were also sent to alumni who have maintained email contacts with the department.
- A summary of the data obtained from this survey were distributed to the department by the Assessment Committee on December 2, 2004 with recommendations concerning potential curriculum revision.
- A copy of this survey, the data obtained during the summer of 2004, and the recommendations of the Assessment Committee are presented in Appendix D.

Anticipated Steps in the Continued Evolution of the Psychology Assessment Plan

As indicated above, a quality assessment plan should never be assumed to be completed. One area where we continue to work is on the “methods” courses required of our majors. Although we have made great progress in reviewing these courses, sharing pedagogical techniques, and modifying some of the course requirements, we have not yet reached sufficient consensus in this area to permit us to design and pilot test an assessment instrument. Some of the highlights of our actions in this area are summarized below.

- In the Fall of 2001, immediately after the first major revisions of PSY 100 were unanimously endorsed, two new committees were formed to assess the content, objectives and outcomes for PSY 250, Introduction to Research Methods and PSY 251, Statistics and Research Design.
 - The PSY 250 review committee, coordinated by Professor Purcell, agreed that all final examinations in PSY 250 will have a comprehensive element to assess these overall objectives for the course as a whole, and many agreed that this assessment will be accomplished through the evaluation of essays rather than the results of multiple-choice examinations.
 - Professor Purcell was further charged to develop an assessment instrument that could be used during the final examination period of all sections of this course to assess how well students have learned the primary course objectives.
 - The PSY 251 review committee recommended that the pre-requisite for the course be revised from the previously ambiguous “high school algebra” to be level R status as determined by the placement testing conducted by the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. This change was unanimously accepted and now appears in the undergraduate catalogue.
 - The PSY 251 review committee further recommended that all sections of PSY 251 incorporate meaningful hands-on experience with the SPSS statistical computer package. Currently all sections of PSY 251 include substantial instruction in the use of SPSS and the interpretation of SPSS output.
 - Professor Stewart was further charged with developing an assessment instrument that could be used during the final examination period of all sections of this course to assess how well students have learned the primary course material. It is anticipated that a portion of this assessment will require a written response rather than the more common multiple-choice format. Rather than directly assessing the students’ ability to create statistical output via SPSS, we will assess their abilities to interpret such output.
- Both the PSY 250 and 251 subcommittees faced both opposition and/or indifference from colleagues who were unwilling to discuss issues of assessment and curriculum revision. When this opposition appeared with respect to PSY 100 we were able to permit faculty to simply decline to participate in

these discussions, and assume other teaching assignments. Given limited resources, this was not an option with PSY 250 and 251. With the support of the University Assessment Committee (letter from John Klemanski to Robert Stewart dated November 26, 2003), we tabled our efforts in devising assessment procedures of these courses so as to protect our momentum in other areas.

- Preliminary reports from the PSY 250 and PSY 251 subcommittees are presented in Appendix E. The Department of Psychology has taken no formal action with regards to these reports. Until such action is taken, we would hope that the University Assessment Committee would recognize that this department is conscientiously involved in the assessment process and will approve our existing plan in its current state. Additions and/or modifications to the plan are expected in the future.

Figure 1: Department of Psychology Assessment Plan 2003-2005

