

2023 CSU FULLERTON PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT REVIEW

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We are pleased to present our assessment of CSU Fullerton's (CSUF) Psychology department based on our review of the materials provided by the department and visit to campus in February 2023. We met with administrators, faculty, lecturers, staff, and students. Everyone welcomed us and provided candid, thoughtful reflections about their strong program and what was needed for it to thrive in the future.

We begin our review by describing what we see as the significant strengths of the department's Psychology program. We then focus on identifying challenges faced by the department. In particular, we consider how the department might engage more productively in its commitment to inclusive excellence and to consider the overall operations of the department, guided by several questions presented by the department's self-study concerning curriculum, pedagogy, student experience, faculty experience, and future directions. In each section, we first describe our views about the challenges facing the department and then offer recommendations for the department and administration to consider.

At CSUF, Psychology is **the** most popular major not only at the college but also the University. The number of majors has grown exponentially in the last few years, growing from ~2000 majors to ~4000 majors. Thus, it is important that the University and the CSU system as whole recognize and support the special needs of a department training so many undergraduates.

I. STRENGTHS OF THE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

A. Collegiality and Personnel

The Psychology department has a core of 28 talented tenured/tenure-track faculty members, plus contributions from adjunct lecturers (17 full-time and short-term) who teach over 60% of the course offerings. These faculty contribute a broad range of expertise to offer an impressive variety of courses, labs, and research opportunities spanning many important areas of Psychology. Importantly, the students we met felt that they had excellent instructors who were committed to their success and wanted more opportunities to work with their professors. Lecturers and staff commonly reported that the department creates a supportive environment where they feel respected and acknowledged for their efforts. Lecturers also appreciate being included in departmental activities.

The faculty also exemplify the teacher-scholar ideal for primarily undergraduate institutions. The faculty strengths in teaching are reflected in the number of majors, in the high graduation rates, and in student reports during our meetings. The course the committee visited showed an engaging class introducing students to current research and encouraging student interaction. The professor incorporated recent relevant research into the discussion, highlighting the importance of faculty staying on top of recent literature/trends in their subfields.

Faculty Scholarship. Many faculty are also productive scholars with distinct strengths in research. Over the past 5 years, the tenured and tenure-track faculty published nearly 170 peer reviewed journal articles, 21 edited book chapters, 5 books, and 1 textbook, in addition to other non-peer reviewed scholarly contributions. Of these publications, the committee was able to determine that 48 were co-authored by undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, the faculty disseminated their scholarship in 281 oral and poster presentations of which 137 were co-authored by undergraduate and graduate students. In addition to research conducted on campus, some faculty maintain active research collaborations outside of CSUF. Further, over the past 5 years, 6 tenured/tenure-track faculty were awarded external grants as Principal investigators (PI) or co-principal investigators (Co-PI); 1 faculty is a co-investigator (Co-I)¹. Faculty recognize the importance of including undergraduates in their research programs.

Faculty Service. Through a review of the faculty curriculum vitae (CVs), the committee commends the contribution of the tenured/tenure-track faculty to the Psychology field and community as journal editors, associate editors, ad-hoc reviewers, leadership in professional societies, grant reviewers, and consultants. Furthermore, over the past 5 years, 16 of the 28 tenured/tenure-track faculty serve(d) on at least 2 committees in service to the department. In addition, about half of the faculty provide service at the college- and university-levels. A few faculty also collaborate with community-based organizations.

Faculty Mentorship. Through a review of faculty CVs, almost half of the tenured/tenure-track faculty listed mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students, including serving on or chairing thesis committees, mentoring students in formal programs (e.g., McNair, MARC, Honors Program), mentoring in research activities, attending professional society meetings with students, co-authorship on publications and presentations, as well as securing student scholarships.

Staff Members. The Psychology department staff are relatively new but they are committed to supporting the department and its students. The staff commended the Psychology faculty and felt that they were treated well and their efforts were acknowledged. The undergraduates in our meeting commented on how helpful and supportive the staff have been when other advising and support resources were not available. Overall, the committee views the supportive staff as crucial to the overall success of the Psychology department.

B. Undergraduate Curriculum

The Psychology department's curriculum aims to provide broad and practical training to undergraduates. The major is designed so that the introduction of skills are scaffolded so that expertise builds upon previous competencies. The major requirements ensure that students have a broad introduction to Psychology as well as in-depth knowledge of specialty areas and internship experiences. The curriculum has attracted a growing number of majors and its success can be observed in the high graduation rate for Psychology majors.

The undergraduate major is heavy in the upper division core curriculum, with only 3 courses required at the lower 100- and 200-level: Introduction to Psychology, Research Methods, and Statistics. At the 300-level, majors are required to take intermediate research methods and statistics, a lab+lecture course

¹ One faculty member noted submitting three NSF grant proposals but no dates were noted

combination (Learning and Memory, Sensation and Perception, Comparative Animal Behavior, Cognitive Psychology, or Biopsychology), 2 courses in clinical/developmental/social areas, one course in applied Psychology area (education, legal, aging, I/O), and at least one 400-level specialty area course. This level of rigor provides undergraduates strength in research methods with smaller class sizes of about 40 students. All students are required to complete one external field placement or research internship.

In 2011, the Psychology department adopted 9 goals for the undergraduate major. These goals are well aligned with the student learning outcomes as well as the university-wide undergraduate learning goals and WSCUC Core competencies. In recent years, the department has created 11 new courses (3 as "specials"), mostly in the 300- and 400-levels, as well as a diversity course requirement (which has not been implemented). Some of the new course offerings reflect current trends in the field (e.g., I/O, health, culture, prejudice and discrimination). The department also offers intensive courses in quantitative methods and analyses. Due to COVID-19 and student demand, the department has increased the number of online courses over the past few years.

II. CHALLENGES OF CSU FULLERTON PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

In identifying the key challenges faced by the department, the committee was struck by the extent to which they are interconnected, with resource challenges at the central hub. Many of the issues are detailed in the department's self-study - undergraduate enrollment pressures, the inability to execute the current curriculum, faculty workload inequity, a lack of mid- and late-career faculty scholarship, a lack of research and travel resources to support scholarship, and staffing. In each of the challenges we describe below, it is evident that funding considerations related to the huge growth of the major are a central theme. In the sections below, we discuss these challenges in detail and provide specific recommendations for addressing them.

A. Undergraduate Enrollment

Since the last performance review in 2014, the number of Psychology majors has increased by 53%. Although this increase is a demonstration of the overall success of the department, such extreme success introduces its own problems. Despite the huge increase in the number of majors, there have been few corresponding increases in department budget, staffing, space, or other support. In fact, the department's budget has *decreased*, rather than *increased*, with only a slight increase in full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty. This almost doubling of students, who need to be supported and trained, is having a continued influence on almost every aspect of this report. Importantly, it is affecting student learning and experience adversely. We strongly recommend that the College and University find additional resources to help the department meet the challenges presented by the ~4000 majors.

B. Curriculum

It has been more than 7 years since the Psychology faculty have made any substantial changes in the major curriculum. With the influx of additional majors, it is a good time for the department to evaluate where curricular changes could be made to have more balanced major requirements. We propose some ideas as to how the department might adjust the current curriculum.

If programmatic changes are to be made, faculty might consider how to better align the curriculum with the [APA Guidelines for Undergraduate Psychology Major 2.0](#). Specifically, the department might think about how the curriculum might achieve Goal 3: *Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World*, and Goal 5: *Professional Development*. There are no course offerings in qualitative methods, a growing trend among students who are interested in pursuing in psychology-related fields, such as social work, education, and counseling.

The committee recommends that the department take a systematic approach to curriculum development. In particular, the department needs to review existing courses for the major and how course offerings are met with current faculty. With 11 new courses recently added, it is unclear how the department can sustain such a wide range of course offerings with small class sizes and external internship requirements. To support this curricular change, the committee recommends that the department try to take advantage of external funding so that faculty are compensated for revising the curriculum. For example, the NSF has two funding options that may support this type of activity: [IUSE: HSI](#) and [IUSE: EDU](#).

Expand Courses with Labs. In the current curriculum, labs are required but only for “experimental” classes and not for developmental, social or clinical classes. This restricted area requirement appears to be a remnant of what the department could support long ago when “experimental” referred to cognitive and behavioral psychology. To revise the undergraduate curriculum and bring it to the 21st century, we suggest that the department consider reorganizing the major lab requirement by expanding the courses that have corresponding labs to also include developmental, clinical and social psychology. This suggestion would not change the units for the lab requirement, it would only expand the topics that provide lab training, and include a larger number of faculty across subfields to teach. The specific labs offered could rotate over semesters. Although this would require the department to develop new lab courses, they could be developed over time.

Field and Research Internships. The field internship and research opportunities are what draw students to the department. From our meeting with the students, it also appears that the current implementation of matching students with internships is not working with the large number of current majors needing this course experience. Students report that there is little structure in place to help them find internships and good placements. Therefore, although the intention to provide field placements is commendable, the current execution of this major requirement has led to poor experiences for the students. With ~4000 undergraduate majors who plan to graduate within 4-5 years, between 400-500 students must find a field placement each semester, with little to no guidance. In addition, there are insufficient positions in Psychology labs to allow many students to receive hands-on research experiences for their internship requirement. It was unclear from the department report or faculty CVs how many undergraduate students are involved in research labs or research programs in the Psychology department. Given the large number of majors, the committee recommends that the department consider whether to keep the internship requirement in the major. If the department wishes to keep the internship requirement in the major, the department must consider how to restructure the requirement. Given the existing teaching and research responsibilities of faculty members, one possibility is to provide support placement advising and operations by creating a separate staff position. Alternatively the department could keep the internship requirement as part of the major, but change it to be an elective rather than a capstone course requirement. Regardless, the department should consider the logistics of supporting internships with so many students.

Need for Inclusive Pedagogy in All Courses. The Psychology faculty voted to have a diversity course requirement as part of the major requirements. Although the committee commends the department for this core requirement, the department has yet to implement it, largely because of the faculty's already stretched resources and its inability to provide enough sections to meet major demand. While the department determines ways to support the diversity course requirement, the committee recommends for the department to immediately consider ways to incorporate justice, equity, diversity and inclusive (JEDI) pedagogy across all levels of the current curriculum. This can be achieved with current resources by revising all course descriptions and syllabi to include issues of diversity and readings/scholarship authored by minoritized scholars. For example, Introductory Psychology could devote units to stereotypes and racism, the Biopsychology topics course could include discussions of intersectionality and scientific communication, the Abnormal Psychology course could include units on culturally competent therapies, and the Developmental Psychology course could devote a unit to the development of racial bias in children. Other courses could include the reading and discussion of articles by diverse authors.

Need for Content Rigor in Courses and Academic Honesty. Faculty and students report that the current curriculum is not meeting intended goals of training students for careers in the real world. The students we met emphasized that they want to be well-trained so that they can find good jobs and make a difference in the world. However, the students we met with indicated that some courses did not cover current research and that their course assessments promoted rote memorization and did not require studying. In addition, the current system for administering exams, especially online exams, encourages cheating and group work on exams. The committee encourages full-time and adjunct faculty to challenge the students with in-depth content that promotes critical thinking and current research. The department might consider hiring a greater proportion of adjunct faculty with PhDs who may be more familiar with current content. The Faculty Development Center may be a good resource for designing better assessments for online courses. Proctored in-class exams, rather than online or take-home exams, could go a long way to reduce cheating.

Academic Advising. The huge number of undergraduate majors has put a tremendous burden on existing faculty advisors as well as staff. Some of the students that we met with said that Psychology majors could graduate without being able to schedule an appointment with an academic advisor during their CSUF career. The sheer number of students needing advising requires a reconsideration of the way advising is conducted. The current structure of advising Psychology majors consists of two tenured/tenure-track faculty and three lecturer faculty (four advisors and one lead) given 3-units of reassigned time for five hours of academic advising per week during the academic semester. This equates to 25 hours of advising per week. They also have three graduate student advisors who offer 15-20 additional hours of advising per week. While the committee commends faculty for wanting to personally advise students, this solution does not meet current student demand for advising and at the same time, takes faculty away from teaching five much needed core courses. Furthermore, the release time of five faculty is very expensive, especially at a time when the department has been experiencing budget constraints. The department intends to hire a full-time professional academic advisor, yet the committee recommends that the department consider hiring a second full-time professional staff advisor to advise students. A Ph.D. degree is not needed to help students negotiate major requirements, as other CSU Psychology departments (e.g., CSUN) have professional advisors on their staff for many years dedicated to serving only Psychology majors.

In addition, the CSUF Psychology Department has a large number of transfer students who need guidance and information sessions specific to transfer student issues. Several transfer students reported the need for advising sessions that provide information not only about meeting graduation requirements, but also research opportunities in faculty labs (e.g., receiving updated lab information and how to apply for lab positions) and funding opportunities (e.g., McNair Scholars and MARC/U-RISE programs).

Finally, the department might consider informing students more explicitly about how to find internship and career opportunities for Psychology majors at Career Services. First-generation college students may experience difficulty accessing internship sites. Perhaps the coordinator can generate make the list of common off-campus internship sites more available. Another option is to connect with the CSUF Career Center who can help Psychology majors learn more about internships as well as employment.

C. Department Resources

The increase in major and a decrease in the department budget has created resource problems at multiple levels. The department cannot implement its curriculum because there is not enough faculty and classroom space to teach the courses. There are not enough student lab research positions because there are not enough faculty with significant research funding and faculty lab space to engage more students in authentic research experiences. The Psychology department cannot hire new faculty to fill open positions because of the lack of lab space. This is a catch-22 situation – they need to offer new classes to meet major demand but there are no available classrooms and they need to hire new faculty but the current building has no space to house new faculty. Despite having “newly” renovated space (completed in 2012), the number of majors has increased 53% and the current space cannot hold them, either for classes or lab experiences. The committee suggests that the department work with the administration to think creatively about space and computing options: shared space, modular units near campus sites, or reallocating and sharing space across departments.

In addition, the Psychology department has computing needs in both the classrooms and research labs; an office computer is not enough to support active research programs and student training. Some faculty reported having research lab computers that were 10 years old, creating cybersecurity issues. Given that operating systems and computers, especially Mac OS computers, become obsolete and cannot be upgraded after a point, faculty need to think creatively about how to keep their research computers updated. One possibility is that the department could develop a line in its OE budget to provide monies to allow non-campus IT computers to be renewed every 4 years. Psychology faculty could consider developing courses that bring their research into the classroom and apply for funds to develop new courses (e.g., Spencer fellowships, NSF IUSE and other NSF-funded course-based undergraduate research experiences [CUREs] programs). Last, the department and the college should work together to solicit support from alumni through existing efforts by the CSUF Philanthropic Foundation.

D. Tenured and Tenure-track Faculty resource issues

Faculty Scholarship. It is important to remain current in the field for both teaching and research, even if department and CSU budgets are tight. Without the ability to attend conferences and interact professionally, faculty research and morale suffer. The committee recommends that more of the department faculty strive to seek external funding to support their professional activities. Only 5

tenured/tenure-track faculty members of the department have external grants as a PI or Co-PI, and 2 faculty members are a Co-I on a grant. External funding provides financial resources (e.g, course release, summer salary, research funds, paid student research positions, etc.) to the PI and may also provide additional funds to the department or college (depending on whether IDC funds are given back to the college/department). In addition, CSUF is positioned to take advantage of grants for institutions supporting under-represented student populations. As an HSI and AANAPISI, there are many federal funding opportunities that the faculty are not taking advantage of (e.g., NIH SuRE, NSF HSI Program, DOEd HSI STEM, NSF IUSE:EDU). To help get started on writing these grants, the committee recommends for the department to talk to the Office of Research Development and/or Office of Research and Sponsored Programs who support a faculty mentoring program whereby a selected few Psychology faculty members interested in writing and submitting a grant are mentored by another faculty in a different department (e.g., Biological Science) or a different university (e.g., CSULA, CSUN).

In addition to non-peer reviewed scholarship, the faculty published an impressive 170 peer-reviewed journal articles over the last 5 years. Averaged across the 27 tenured/tenure-track faculty members (one did not submit a CV), this is about 6.3 peer-reviewed journal articles per faculty. Yet, 14 of the faculty published 4 or fewer articles over a 5-year period, with 10 publishing 2 or less peer-reviewed articles. Similarly, of the 281 oral and poster presentations, the average was 10.4 presentations per faculty member. However, 12 of the faculty reported 5 or fewer presentations, and for many, it was unclear if students were co-authors. While some of the dissemination of research may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty suggested that there is a lack of financial support to attend professional conferences to present their research. Attending and presenting at professional conferences is essential for faculty development to stay on top of current research, network with other scholars, and help students in their professional development and network with potential graduate mentors.

Faculty Service. In reviewing the tenured/tenure-track faculty CVs, the committee noted that although faculty are involved in service, it is lacking at the department level. At least 12 tenured/tenure-track faculty reported serving on only one or no departmental committees over the past 5 years. Many of these faculty actually noted serving as an academic advisor as service to the department, but these faculty already are compensated by receiving a reduced teaching load. The committee sees this unequal distribution of department service as a strain on other faculty members who have to carry the burden of department service in addition to college or university service. While many departmental faculty provide service to the field and the university, it is equally important to also to provide service to the department.

In addition, from discussions with the faculty and chair, the committee noted that the department did not have an established mentorship program that assigned senior faculty to mentor junior and mid-career tenure-track faculty. Having an experienced go-to person can greatly aid new faculty at any level in negotiating the complications of the CSUF system. Mentorship partnerships help form friendships and collegial alliances that support new faculty members and help with faculty retention, especially for underrepresented or faculty of color. Finally, mentorship relationships build personal bridges that may help to reduce some of the tension in department relations.

Staff Members. The current staff have been stretched thin with the influx of so many students, especially at undergraduate levels, but also at graduate levels. The staff help with scheduling, advising, admissions, major requirement documentation, etc. The committee recommends that the college consider hiring a new

staff member to support the current department staff. The staff indicated that their work comes in waves that are not at the same time for the different staff members. A new staff member who was a “swing” person, trained in the different staff areas, could help reduce the burden of the huge numbers of majors by working with each of the existing staff members when their workload was greatest.

D. Department Climate and DEI Issues

Given the size of the department, changes in education as a result of COVID, the large number of majors, faculty turnover, and turnover in department chair leadership, it is not surprising that there are points of disagreement among members of the department. Nonetheless, the committee observed high tension among faculty members regarding DEI and workload issues. While the Psychology department strives to implement the university's mission, the committee could not find the department's own mission and vision in their report. A lack of mission and common vision may be one reason why there is contention, since there is no uniform direction. It may be that important decisions, such as hiring priorities and course curriculum creation are aligned with or guided by a concrete mission or vision.

While it is impossible for all faculty to agree, a general consensus could be achieved by a majority of the faculty. The committee suggests hosting a two-day working retreat (prior to the commencement of the fall semester) to develop a shared vision and a five-year strategic plan. The retreat could also address the issue of identity: Is there a collective identity of the Psychology department at CSUF? What are the values and goals of the department? Alternatively, if the budget does not allow (or in addition), an ad-hoc committee could be formed to develop a vision and a five-year plan.

Many STEM disciplines are embracing DEI initiatives². With an undergraduate student population that is majority-minority, high age diversity, as well as other forms of diversity, it is important to incorporate the experiences of minoritized students in the curriculum. Similarly, the experiences of diverse faculty need to be included in department decisions. To reduce tension in departmental meetings stemming from DEI topics, we recommend implementing secret ballots when making decisions (e.g., hiring priorities, curriculum changes, voting on job candidates). Secret ballots are important to protect faculty who feel vulnerable (e.g., untenured faculty, minoritized faculty). There is concern that if the departmental tensions are not addressed, faculty may withdraw and eventually be pushed out³ of the department.

To further reduce tension in departmental meetings regarding the inequity of service workload, the development of a mission and vision statement is crucial to ensuring that all members of the Psychology community are working towards the goals of the department. If student success is valued, then the retention, promotion, and tenure process needs to reflect student mentorship in research and other scholarly activities. There needs to be a balance between service to the university, college, and department. Faculty at all levels need to provide some service to the department. It is up to the department to ensure that the service workload is distributed equitably.

² Garelnabi et al., 2022 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9021758/> ; <https://diversity.nih.gov/> ; Gibbs, 2014 <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/diversity-in-stem-what-it-is-and-why-it-matters/> ; Huff, 2021 <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/10/feature-diversity-problem>

³ “Pushout” refers to factors that contribute to minoritized faculty leaving a department or academia.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We see the CSUF Psychology Department as a dedicated and talented group of individuals, and we offer these recommendations to support its continued success. We advise CSUF leadership to sustain and further develop its understaffed and overstretched Psychology program so it can continue to offer current and future students a uniquely valuable Psychology education. The challenges facing the department appear to be highly interconnected, mostly related to a 50% increase in majors with no or fewer resources. Working both with an outside consultant as well as forming committees within the department to develop common goals and a five-year plan could improve the climate of the department, especially along DEI issues. Finally, we believe that enacting a few key changes can have a cascading effect on many of the challenges we have identified above.