



College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Office of the Dean
P.O. Box 6850
Fullerton, CA 92834-6850
T (657) 278-3528 / F (657) 657-278-5898

To: Su Swarat, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Dr. Jessica, Interim Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date: January 27, 2024

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the BA and MA in Psychology

The Department of Psychology is the largest department in the College, with 29 tenure/tenure-track faculty and 45 part-time faculty. As of the Fall 2023 census, there are 3824 Psychology BA majors, 64 minors, 29 graduate students in the MA program, and 44 graduate students in the MS program (which was reviewed separately last year). The undergraduate program has grown 53% since the last PPR, and it continues to grow—between Fall 2022 to Fall 2023 it gained an additional 183 students. Since the department can exercise direct control over their graduate student enrolments, they have been able to maintain their graduate student size at a sustainable level. The College and Department has been eagerly awaiting the University to adopt program-based enrolment that would allow us to better control the number of PSYC undergraduate students.

On December 15, 2023, Dean Fontaine, Associate Dean Stern, Chair Jessie Peissig, and MA Coordinator David Gerkens met to discuss the self studies, BA external report, the MA external report, and the department responses in preparation for crafting the recommendations below. While the self study and external review team reports were conducted separately for the BA and MA programs, my recommendations combine my assessments due to significant overlap.

The department has undergone conflict over the past several years, emerging first from student complaints via a memo written by the Psychology Association of Graduate Students of Color and Allies (PAGSOCA), and then faculty complaints (which culminated in a memo signed by five faculty members), that the department was not supporting racial equity, adopting culturally competent pedagogy, or providing students with the respect and supportive guidance they need to thrive. The environment that precipitated these memos and the charges themselves have caused much debate and pain throughout the department. Committed to creating a department atmosphere where all students and faculty feel valued and free to engage in dialogue, the University and College brought in an external facilitator who guided the department to spend the Fall 23 semester identifying their common commitments by revising their Mission and Goals and creating Community Guidelines.



My intention is that these PPR recommendations will provide further guidance as the department reformulates their mission and goals and aligns their curriculum, searches, and organizational structures in light of these goals.

While most of what I write below identifies areas of improvement, I don't want my admiration for the Psychology faculty to be lost. Some of my most meaningful conversations about supporting students and nurturing students as they become intellectuals and ethical community members have been with Psychology faculty. Through labs, innovative courses, study abroad programs, independent studies, and directing graduate research, faculty provide intensive and individualized guidance to their students. They are productive scholars; as the BA external review team tabulated, in the last five years the Psychology faculty have published 170 peer-reviewed journal articles! All this while tending to a department that serves more students than some of our Colleges on campus. My appreciation for this department runs deep, and I see the ways that the department can build on its strong foundation and support students and faculty even more thoroughly than they are now.

Since its last PPR, the department has made minor tweaks to its BA curriculum—adding and deleting some courses and changing the names of others. This curriculum has served the department well, and the department's management of the courses has led to impressive student graduation rates. The first-year student four-year graduation rate is currently 47.9%, which exceeds the 44% GI 2025 goal, and the transfer two-year graduation rate is 43.8%, just shy of the 44% GI 2025 goal. For a department this size, this is quite a feat. An in-depth GI 2025 analysis conducted by the college in 2021 showed that PSYC BA students who were underrepresented minorities were more likely to graduate than their peers in six years, while there was a 2.3% gap in three-year transfer graduation for underrepresented minorities. While there was no pell-recipient graduation gap for first year students, there was a 8.4% gap for transfer students. A gender gap exists for all students—6.5% for first-years and 15% for transfers, with female-identifying students graduating more quickly than male-identifying students. These data suggest that the department is doing very well supporting its students who enter in their first year, but needs to consider how to better support transfer students. They participated in the "Spring Transfers in Transition" grant secured by the college in Spring 2021, where they experimented with special programming for Spring transfers. Revising some of those activities could be worth their while, particularly embedding cohort activities into PSYC 300.



The MA student graduation rate is not great, and I would like to see more reflection on why it is taking over four years for 25% of the MA students to graduate, and less than half of the MA students (at its low only 18.8%) to graduate in two years. If students are deliberately taking longer (the grad survey administered by Grad Studies suggests 65% of MA students are happy with their grad program pace) that is fine. **Attention should be focused on whether there are barriers preventing students from graduating when they aspire to graduate.** Seriously engaging with the Grad Studies survey would provide some areas to start to investigate. While some of the reasons students identify as barriers may feel beyond the control of an academic program (for example, external employment and caregiving obligations) it would be worth considering whether advisors and faculty could better help students navigate their education in light of these obligations. Could there be better orientation provided to students? I sensed during the meeting a desire to dismiss the survey results; I encourage program leadership to push through that impulse and to seriously consider how to address some of the student concerns.

As the student population grows and becomes more diverse, the region that it strives to serve becomes more diverse, and the discipline shifts, there are exciting opportunities to re-evaluate the undergraduate and graduate curriculum. Even prior to the conversations spurred by the faculty memo in early 2023, but supercharged because of them and by the PPRs, the department began re-evaluating its curriculum. The action items of the MS PPR in 2022 strove to set the program on a path to revise processes and curriculum to address these charges by making the following commitments, “The program will evaluate and, where needed, revise syllabi of core PSYC MS courses, and key elective courses” to “provide students with cultural competency and reflect the new 2022 scope of practice laws for the LMFT,” and making “demonstrated cultural competency” a criteria for serving as program coordinator.

The conversations about adding curriculum to help our Psychology BA students become more culturally competent also began before the PPR. The department had voted to add a 3-unit diversity requirement, but had not yet figured out how to operationalize it across such a large major—the HSS data analyst projected that the department will need 850 seats per semester in this new requirement. That requirement has since been formally included into the curriculum. In addition, a group of faculty had several meetings with the Associate Dean to discuss concentrations and advising tracts in Fall 2022, and suggested the department was considering three tracts—neuroscience, industrial/organizational psychology, and multicultural psychology. While it was not feasible to create formal concentrations because of the difficulty of identifying a core that would comprise 51% of each concentration and a requirement that all concentrations remain at 41 units, the department decided to create advising tracks that would allow students to informally navigate the requirements around a theme. The Dean’s office supports this approach and is happy to hear that the neuroscience and industrial/organizational psychology tracks are built out and ready to advertise. **I would like to see a**



Multicultural or diversity track conceptualized and out within the next year. I know that the multicultural/diversity area may not yet have enough courses, but building out a long-term plan for this track would be prudent and give guidance for hiring priorities.

I am also glad to see that the department has identified a faculty to lead the curricular revision to bring the curriculum in line with the APA Guidelines for Undergraduate Psychology Major 2.0, particularly Goal 3: *Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World* and Goal : 5 *Professional Development*, as suggested by the External Review Team. Note that since the External Review Team’s visit, the APA has published version 3.0 of its guidelines (<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/undergraduate-psychology-major.pdf>). Regarding Goal 3, the new document notes:

We have modified Goal 3 with a name change to provide a showcase for “Values in Psychological Science.” Equity, diversity, and inclusion were themes not just housed in Goal 3 but addressed throughout the document where relevant. We retained the importance of building and using psychological knowledge and skills to develop interpersonal and intercultural competence, but also increased the importance of psychology’s role in addressing community, national, and global issues.

This curricular revision work will be supported by 3 units from the Provost’s office. In addition to, but inclusive of, the APA revisions, **I encourage the department to create a first-year experience for their first-year and transfer Psychology students that will introduce students to the field, demystify the hidden curriculum, identify potential career and post-graduation paths, and build community.** The first-year experience could be built into special cohort sections of PSYC 101 and PSYC 300, or you have room at the lower-division to add an additional course, and raise your total units to 44 units, which may be the way to go given that a number of your majors may come in having satisfied 101 with AP credit. I acknowledge the size of this undertaking; with an average of 600 FTF entering yearly, you would need about 17 sections for first-year students alone. You could start with offering this opportunity to certain subpopulations, such as first-generation students, which would reduce the number of sections needed to 6 for first-years.

There are a few curricular items raised by the BA PPR External Review Team that deserve continued departmental discussion. First, the External Review Team is concerned about the department capacity to continue to have an internship requirement. I have also shared this concern in the past. Though the department remains committed to retaining the internship as a requirement (rather than an option, as the External Review Team suggests and I would support), and identifies new ways they will support the internship, I want to be sure that they **continue to**



monitor the feasibility and necessity of this internship requirement and ensure that the tweaks are solving the issues identified. I would also like the department to have a **clearer sense of what differentiates 300-level and 400-level courses, and what are the expectations at each level.** The inconsistency in 400-level workload of Psychology courses has been flagged as an issue by the College Curriculum Committee too, and I want the department to create guidelines. It is problematic that students shared with the External Review Team that they did not feel that they would graduate with proper training and that “some courses did not cover current research and that their course assessments promoted rote memorization and did not require studying.” While I know that the departmental discussion about online exams and academic honesty was one of the racial climate triggers, **the department needs to continue having discussions about assessment norms and how to create environments where students do not consider producing work that is not their own.**

The MA program added an additional methods/analysis course in response to the last PPR. During our December 15 meeting, Dr. Gerken shared that students are not very interested in quantitative analysis, and the department is trying to be as flexible as possible to allow completion of this requirement. He also pointed out that there is only one course—500—that is an MA-only course. The program should discuss whether their curriculum should be revised. While the External Review Team recommended adding tracks to the MA program, I am not as convinced. If they mean by this creating a stronger rotation of courses so that students know which courses to expect, I am behind this idea. But if they mean that students will only take courses within their track, the program would have to first demonstrate how to support subdividing into four different groups taking four different sets of courses. A related point, however, that the program could use a better center/centers of focus that can be made transparent to prospective students is well taken.

This point feeds well into the department mission and goals. I am very glad to see that in Fall 23 the department invested in identifying a common commitment and drafting a new version of the mission and goals. The next step will be to ensure that this mission is used consistently as an anchor to help the department make future decisions about their policies and procedures, curriculum, and hiring priorities. When the departments job search requests, and final position descriptions, hit the Dean’s Office my expectation is that they will reflect the agreed upon mission and carefully consider the identified curricular needs. Extrapolating from UPS 210.001, all new searches will need to:



- *Be consistent with the Department's, College's, and University's strategic plans, the University's affirmative action plan, and accreditation needs.*
 - *Note that I will require alignment with your new mission and the new University Strategic Plan that will be unveiled on February 7.*
- *Shall be based on forecasting curricular needs*
 - *The most pressing curricular need is to support the Diversity Requirement and curriculum that has been realigned with APA 3.0. I will require that every PD explicitly require a research or teaching interest in areas of diversity, with the definition of diversity being consistent with that used by APA and adopted by the department.*
 - *All new search requests must include data that demonstrate both student demand and a tenure/tenure-track deficit. I will have our data analyst work with the Psychology Chair to identify other curricular areas that are underserved by tenure/tenure-track faculty and demonstrate unmet student demand.*

The last year has identified how the lack of adequate faculty, staff, and administrative resources likely exacerbated tensions. There is both internal and external work that needs to be done to ease the service and administrative demands. Externally, the College has added three full-time staff advisors to the department, complementing the four faculty advisors who are each given 3-units of assigned time. We think at least two more advisors are needed, and will work to identify resources. The Provost's office has also given the department 6 additional units for assigned time for a curriculum lead (discussed above) and another vice chair. I will also work with our budget manager to determine how to make sure department lab equipment is updated and regularly maintained. I will also explore with the Psychology leadership whether creating smaller administrative units is possible. This could take the form of creating separate departments built around concentrations—a model could be the Business Degree, where students spend their first two years a pre-business majors who share a core, and then, in their third year, choose a concentration, each of which is aligned with a separate department. Or this could take the form of creating more defined sub-fields. We will spend the next year determining options.

Internally, there is also work that can be done. The External Review Team did an expert analysis of faculty CVs and—assuming those CVs are accurate—revealed significant workload inequity in the department. Here it is worth copying from that report:



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.

I understand from the conversation with the current Chair that she has put into place processes that more equally divide up the service work such as restructuring committees so that they have meaningful work and equal obligations and evaluating committee assignments so that everyone is assigned one committee. This expectation that all faculty members contribute to department service needs to be institutionalized so that future Chairs have a process by which to ensure workload equity. Since there also appears to be mentorship inequities, I recommend that student mentorship also be incorporated into the process of setting department service obligations. **Please work with Associate Dean Graham on this project of service workload equity.**

In summary, I applaud the Psychology Department for serving so many students and managing their course offerings, advising, and student mentorship in a way that has made the department leaders in meeting the GI 2025 goals for their undergraduate students. As the department continues to build on their new Mission and Goals, and revise their curriculum, I request they:

- Consider why the graduation rates of their transfer students are not as strong as the rates for students who enter as first-year students, and work to rectify
- Consider why MA students may not be graduating in the time they had hoped to and how to remove barriers
- Determine how the MA curriculum should be revamped
- Consider a first-year course or cohorted activities for new first-year and transfer students
- Map out a multicultural/diversity advising track for undergraduate students and work to bring the track to fruition
- Set expectations for 400-level courses
- Continue discussion about assessment norms and how to create classroom environments that don't incentivize academic dishonesty
- Monitor sustainability of the internship requirement



College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Office of the Dean
P.O. Box 6850
Fullerton, CA 92834-6850
T (657) 278-3528 / F (657) 657-278-5898

- Assure that all new search requests and PDs are aligned with the new university strategic plan and new department mission, as well as meet the curricular need of the diversity requirement and other curricular needs as supported by data
- Work with Associate Dean Natalie Graham on workload equity

The College commits itself to identifying resources for more staff academic advisors, a lab equipment refresh, and ensuring that the department has the administrative structure and support that is appropriate to its size.

To provide continuing support in meeting these goals, the Dean's Office will request a progress report by June 2025.

Sincerely,

Jessica Stern, PhD
Interim Dean