

Department of Psychology Assessment 2011 to 2012

Learning Objectives: The Department of Psychology has 7 learning objectives, which stem from the American Psychological Association's guidelines.

1. Students will be familiar with major concepts, theories, and findings in psychology.
2. Students will be able to understand and interpret quantitative psychological data such as graphs and statistics.
3. Students will be familiar with and able to work with common research methods such as surveys and experiments in psychology.
4. Students will be able to read and write in the format of psychological research.
5. Students will be able to understand the career options in psychology and related fields.
6. Students will be able to understand and apply principles of ethics and respect for individual, social, and cultural differences in psychology.
7. Students will have had the opportunities to participate in psychological research directed by Psychology Faculty.

Current Assessment: The Department of Psychology currently engages in the process of assessment by a) monitoring student performance in courses that target specific goals, b) conducting exit surveys of graduating seniors which measure students' perceptions of how well we are meeting each of our 7 learning objectives c) collecting statistics on student participation in research opportunities. We lack, however, direct evidence concerning the degree to which students retain their knowledge, are able to synthesize it, and can apply their critical thinking skill towards problems relevant to the field of psychology.

Assessment Plan for 2011 to 2012: The goal this year is to obtain more direct, behavioral evidence of students' thinking skills. Towards this end, we focus on the assessing the three learning objectives most relevant to understanding psychological research (learning objectives: 2, 3, and 4). This assessment will be accomplished by devising a skills assessment instrument that examines student's ability to apply the critical thinking skills and knowledge that they should have gleaned during their tenure in the program. The primary reason for designing the skills assessment instrument is to gather direct evidence relevant to Learning Objective 1, but the nature of the subject matter will also help us assess Learning Objectives 2 and 3.

Learning Objective 1: Students will be able to understand and interpret quantitative psychological data such as graphs and statistics

Evidence:

- Successful completion of Stat 200, PSYCH 301W, and entrance to major requirements and major coursework
- Exit survey
- Skills assessment instrument
 - Formulate the proper interpretation of novel data
 - Identify the correct pictorial description of data
 - Determine the correct statistical analysis for various types of problems

- Describe the design of a study
- Understand what can and cannot be concluded based on a data set
- Identify false claims based on faulty logic

Learning Objective 2: Students will be familiar with and able to work with common research methods such as surveys and experiments in psychology.

Evidence:

- Successful completion of Stat 200, PSYCH 301W, and entrance to major requirements and major coursework
- Exit survey
- Skills Test
 - Design both correlation and experimental studies to test a hypothesis.
 - Determine the correct statistical test
 - Describe the design of a study
 - Understand what can and cannot be concluded based on a data set
 - Identify false claims

Learning Objective 3: Students will be able to read and write in the format of psychological research.

Evidence:

- Successful completion of Stat 200, PSYCH 301W, and entrance to major requirements, and major coursework including PSYCH 490
- Exit survey
- Skills Test
 - Evidence of comprehending scientific findings
 - Describe the design of a study
 - Correct mistakes in APA format
 - Identify best writing practices

Proposal:

We propose to develop a skills assessment instrument to examine students' progress with respect to these goals. Even though students learn information relevant to these goals in all their classes, starting with PSYCH 100 and PSYCH 105, these key goals are highly relevant to PSYCH 301W (research methods). Thus, in order to fully understand students' knowledge, it is key that we assess students after they take PSYCH 105 and 301W. The current plan is to conduct the assessment as part of PSYCH 490, the senior seminar capstone course, which all seniors must take after finishing their core psychological requirements.

How will the assessment information be used? The assessment information will be useful in terms of a) informing psych 490 instructors prior to the course where students' strengths and weaknesses may reside, allowing the instructors the freedom to assume knowledge in certain areas and to work on skills in other areas b) providing feedback to all instructors, especially those teaching PSYCH 105 and PSYCH 301W, concerning what is being retained, what are the strengths/weaknesses of the students, and what skills may need greater attention/development. C) guiding efforts to revise the curriculum in order to better achieve these goals. (D) possibly to provide student's with feedback on their strengths/weakness

Timeline:

Summer 2011

- Form an assessment committee. Membership must include Psych 301W instructors
- Develop an assessment measure. The focus will be on learning objective 1, but 2 and 3 will probably be assessed in the process.

Fall 2011

- Pilot test assessment instrument in selected psych 490 courses.
- Revise measure

Spring 2012

- Assess students in PSYCH 490s
- Analyze data and provide feedback to instructors

Summer 2012

- Revise assessment test
- Provide recommendations for any changes

Future assessments will also be conducted to determine if we have improved our ability to help students meet these key goals. The long term goal is to track students' intellectual growth from the time that they take their first psychology course (PSYCH 100) to their senior year.