

Department of Psychology Assessment Report 2007-2008

I. Objectives

The Department of Psychology approved the following curriculum objectives on in 2005. Students entering JMU during the Fall 2006 began the new major which utilized the following list of objectives.

New Psychology Major Curriculum Objectives (Final Approval - April 18, 2005)

General Psychology (GPSSYC 101)

1. summarize basic theories, concepts and principles of the field of psychology, and how they are influenced by various factors, such as biological, cognitive, developmental, environmental, and social processes.
2. describe the empirical nature of scientific inquiry, and summarize basic research procedures used within the field of psychology.
3. summarize key ethical issues encountered in conducting research and making use of research findings.
4. recognize the key components of critical thinking, and apply critical thinking skills to scholarly and popular media.
5. recognize the historical and cultural influences on basic psychological processes, research findings, and psychological theories.
6. describe the relevance and practical application of psychological knowledge to their everyday lives.

Methodology Sequence Courses

7. demonstrate basic research skills in psychology including: research design, data analysis and interpretation, analysis of ethical issues and application of ethical principles related to psychological research.
8. use critical thinking, skeptical inquiry, and when possible a scientific approach to solve problems related to psychological phenomena.
9. demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for research purposes.
10. effectively report empirical research in written form using APA-style and in an oral presentation format.

Natural and Social Science Area Courses

11. explain major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings and historical trends in a subset of subfields in psychology.
12. describe how basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation are applied in various subfields of psychology.
13. use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and when possible the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.
14. recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity and their impact on behavior and mental processes.

15. describe key terms and concepts and summarize important issues in the area of specialization.

Upper Level Specialty Content Courses

16. summarize how the concepts and issues from the area of specialization relate to content in core methodology and content courses.

17. demonstrate critical thinking about specific issues related to the area of specialization for the specific course.

18. apply psychological principles to critical issues within the area of specialization for the specific course.

Capstone Courses

19. analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information from primary sources to address psychologically relevant issues.

20. demonstrate effective written communication skills using APA style to prepare empirically based reports, literature reviews, theoretical papers, and/or program evaluations.

21. demonstrate effective oral communication skills at the individual level using one or more professional formats (e.g., individual paper/proposal presentation, participate as a member of a symposium, etc.); participation in class discussion alone is not sufficient.

Sociocultural Awareness Courses

22. *describe the sociocultural contexts that influence individual differences.*

23. explain how individual differences influence beliefs, values, and interactions with others and vice versa.

24. explain how privilege, power, and oppression may affect prejudice, discrimination, and inequity.

25. recognize prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors that might exist in themselves and others.

II. Course/Learning Experiences

See the JMU Catalog for the required program of study for the Psychology Major. The learning objectives described above, and the matrix at the beginning of this report are based upon our conceptualization of the Psychology Major as approved by our faculty on April 18, 2005.

III. Evaluation/Assessment Methods

Area Concentration Achievement Test

The Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT) in Psychology is a standardized test designed to measure content knowledge. The Psychology Assessment Committee selected the 10 content areas that are assessed with the version of this examination that is administered at JMU. The test is a two hour multiple-choice exam covering the principal sub-disciplines of psychology. The test is intended for senior Psychology Majors who are not necessarily graduate school bound. It examines mastery of concepts, principles, and knowledge expected of students at the end of their program.

The Information Literacy Test for Psychology Majors

The Information Literacy Test for Psychology Majors was developed by Lynn Cameron in consultation with the assessment subcommittee and with the Center of Assessment and Research (CARS). The library liaison made minor changes to the test because of changes to various web links, but for the most part, the test is similar to previous versions. Although the content of the test is similar, the format of the test did change. In the past, this was an online test. And for the last few years several students encountered computer errors while taking the test. To solve this problem, we had students mark their answers on a Scantron card (instead of a computer program). The test consisted of 39 multiple-choice items that measured knowledge in three areas: identifying citations, database searching, and evaluation of sources. The test included searches of LEO, PsycInfo and the Internet. (In the past, the test measured additional content areas, but we reduced the scales to just three that we felt would be more meaningful.)

APA Learning Goals

Students completed a Self-Reflection Exercise of the APA's Learning Goals for the Psychology Major. This instrument was modified from the one used in previous years. Kenn Barron and psychology major student Kara Makara developed this instrument. Students were asked to make four ratings on each of the ten learning goals for undergraduate psychology recently identified by the American Psychological Association (APA). As recommended by a more recent draft published by the APA, each student was asked to rate each goal on the different levels of learning from Bloom's Taxonomy of Knowledge. Students were asked if they remember learning about the goal, if they understand the goal, if they can apply the goal, and finally if they can evaluate/analyze the goal. They also were prompted to explain their ratings by providing open-ended feedback. Students expecting to graduate in May or December of 2008 took the survey.

Motivation Scale

All students completed the 10-item Motivation Scale developed by Donna Sundre to assess their motivation and effort while taking the psychology assessment. This scale is also known as the Student Opinion Survey (SOS). Higher scores on this test indicate higher motivation. The maximum score is 50. This 10-item test has two sub-scores: importance and effort.

Senior Exit Survey

The Senior Exit Survey of the Department of Psychology is an instrument developed by the assessment subcommittee to collect data for Academic Program Reviews. It consists of 113 items covering most aspects of student experience in the major: faculty and peer advising; relationships with school administrators and staff; communications; course evaluation; overall satisfaction with the major; achievement of goals and objectives; reasons for choosing a Psychology Major; special learning experiences; future plans. Currently, the test is taken online.

Other Assessment Projects

Several faculty, or faculty-student teams have been conducting additional assessment projects throughout the academic year. These projects each have focused goals and their own methodology, and sometimes result in contributions to the professional literature regarding

assessment in psychology. These projects and their finds are reported at the end of this report, prior to the appendices.

Procedures

All Psychology Majors who were expected to graduate in 2008 were contacted by e-mail and required to participate in assessment testing on February 12, 2008. This requirement was also announced in upper-level psychology classes. Students unable to attend Assessment Day were asked to complete a make-up test.

At the start of Assessment Day, all students completed the Academic Skills Inventory. Only students graduating in May were eligible to take the standardized content test (ACCAT). The rationale for this is to insure that they have completed most (if not all) of their psychology coursework before being asked to take the content test. Remaining May graduates, and all other graduates, were directed to a computer laboratory to complete the Information Literacy Test for Psychology Majors and the APA Learning Goals. At the end of Assessment Day, all students completed the Motivation Scale. For the make-up activities, students completed the Information Literacy Test for Psychology Majors, Self-Reflection Exercise on APA Goals, and the Motivation Scale. Based on the number of graduation applications filed this year, we estimate that at least 90% of our graduating seniors participated in Assessment Day activities or completed a make-up exam.

All students were also asked to complete the on-line version of the Senior Exit Survey. 182 students completed the survey during the Spring semester.

IV. Objective Accomplishments/Results

Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACCAT)

Results for the 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 ACCAT administrations are provided in Tables 1 through 4. The self-reported characteristics of students taking the ACCAT are listed below in Table 1. Test scores for each of the ACCAT subscales are listed in Tables 2, 3, and 4. The ACCAT is standardized with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100. Percentile ratings are presented in the tables. Percentiles represent the rankings of JMU students compared to other institutions using the ACCAT with senior students. The institutions in the comparison group vary from year to year and are not representative of all four-year undergraduate psychology programs. The methods of selection of participants at other institutions, their participation rates, preparation of students, and reasons for testing is not known and is not likely to be consistent with our methodology. For these reasons, results of the ACCAT are less useful for determining the strength of our program in comparison to other institutions. The ACCAT is most useful for the identification of relative strengths and weakness within the JMU psychology program from year to year. It will be very important to note changes in our scores as students begin to complete the new curriculum.

Students take the individual ACCAT sub-scale tests regardless of whether or not they have completed the related class. We are proud of the performance of our students on the ACCAT. Our student scores dropped slightly from last year. However, our students still scored above the 50th percentile in most areas. This year, our students performed better than last year on the Animal Learning/Motivation subtest. Scores were lower than last year on the Abnormal, Experimental Design, Human Learning/Cognition, Personality, Physiological, Sensation and