

Department/Program: Psychology

Chair/Director: Fletcher Blanchard

Retreat Date: May 9, 2008

Departmental/program faculty in attendance: Blanchard, DiBartolo, Duncan, Frost, Harrington, Jackson, Palmer, Peake, Peterson, Powell, Wraga, Zamboanga,

Outside guest(s)/speaker(s) in attendance: None

Goals for the retreat: Our departmental planning committee identified five issues that overlapped both our decennial review recommendations from 2006 and current college initiatives. These were (1) prerequisites, stratification, & 300-level opportunities in the major, (2) writing in the major, (3) coherence within each of our tracks in the major, (4) threads involving extra-departmental linkages, especially languages, and (5) student involvement in research over the four years in the major. For each of these five discussions the planning committee assembled information about the state of affairs in the department and, in some cases, information about the current approaches represented among the nine COFHE psychology departments with whom we had compared ourselves in our recent self-study (2006). The planning committee also brought recommendations that might focus each of these discussions. In each case we noted whether or not there was sufficient enthusiasm to warrant bringing to the department more detailed and specific proposals for action this year.

Outcomes: We found sufficient common ground to move forward toward departmental action in respect to (1) some changes in prerequisites and increasing stratification and sequencing among courses in the major, (2) threads involving linkages with language departments that might allow our students to encounter psychology through the research journals and other scientific writings in their second language, and (3) altering honors in psychology so that it might encompass courses and other programmatic features and activities that begin as early as the sophomore year and span the junior and senior years.

Plans to achieve outcomes: Our planning committee will bring proposals to the department in each of these areas during 2008-2009.

How do your plans advance departmental goals as outlined in mid-term or decennial reports?

Our visiting committee recommended that we

(1) Replace the faculty line that was held by Brenda Allen, and add two further lines as soon as possible.

Nnamdi Pole has joined us this year to teach in our clinical psychology area and offer Psychology of the Black Experience. We failed to gain approval two years ago for a five-college international psychology position based at Smith. We are resurrecting that request this year with what we believe to be greater support from deans among our

collaborating five-college partners. We will also start to pursue another position this year.

(2) Develop linkages and collaborations with other departments and programs, both within and beyond Smith.

Psychology has an intimate relationship with the Neuroscience Program in part because leadership for its creation came from us. Student enrollments in that program are strong and the number of majors reached an all-time high last year at 60, a figure that is about 40% as high as the separate psychology major. Our courses are cross-listed with several other departments and programs. We have initiated a collaboration with the other colleges in the five-college consortium for a position in international or global psychology. Other inter-departmental possibilities at Smith are under discussion.

(3) Consider ways to improve psychology course access.

We are once again systematically reviewing the form and structure of our offerings in an attempt to ensure access for students. Our seminars regularly turn students away, while about 7 of our 200-level lecture courses have grown so large (all exceeding 50 and averaging about 70) to have fundamentally altered the pedagogy to the detriment of those enrolled. We are this year offering an additional 40-student section of statistics to accommodate the large increased demand. We shall consider this year transforming some of our advanced seminars and research seminars into colloquia in order to increase the enrollment limits, adding more prerequisites to the 200-level lecture courses, continuing to adjust the way we teach courses in the introductory sequence, and developing a more programmatic approach to involving students in research.

(4) Reduce curricular redundancy among psychology courses below the 300 level.

Accomplished

(5) Enhance communication with (and among) students to prevent them from getting "lost" in the psychology major.

Improved but remains a challenge given the raw numbers of students and majors

(6) Achieve more student advising equity within the Psychology Department and across departments.

We have reduced the discrepancy mostly by making each other aware every semester of the range of advising loads in our department and by encouraging prospective majors to contact those just returning from sabbatical for adviser duties. However, our 11 or 12 to 1 ratio of majors to FTE, the high rate at which our colleagues advise majors in programs, coupled with our duties to advise pre-majors continues to produce a very high advisee to FTE ratio. At this time that range is from a low of 16 to a high of 37 total advisees per adviser. Some but no all of the higher totals arise because some in our

department shoulder disproportionately heavy loads of non-psychology program majors.

(7) Expand the advising and career resources available through the Psychology Department web site and the Career Development Office.

accomplished

(8) increase administrative and secretarial support, including support for grant administration.

We achieved a modest increase in administrative support this year, mostly because members of our department take the lead on the college's human subjects review board (IRB). We will continue to pursue this recommendation as a tactic for managing the enrollment loads. No intra-departmental help with grants management appears likely for the foreseeable future.

(9) Explore the feasibility of offering a one-semester study abroad experience in psychology.

Under discussion

(10) Identify and regularly assess key educational outcomes.

Ongoing

Current studies assess enrollees adherence to stated prerequisites and patterns of distribution across the tracks of our major.

How does the departmental/program plan to integrate the list of intellectual capacities into the major? For instance, are specific capacities such as writing, speaking or quantitative skills developed in particular courses, or a series of courses?

Quantitative skills are already a feature of our major. There is a required statistics course, an optional advanced statistics courses, and our lab courses at the introductory and advanced levels feature quantitative analysis and reasoning. Our capacity to offer statistics is stretched to the breaking point despite our collaboration with Math to share staffing resources. This year we will offer an additional 40 student section in part because these courses are attractive to students outside the major.

Formal attention to speaking skills is less widely distributed among the areas of concentration in our major, although two colloquia and several of our seminars include formal instruction and coaching around effective oral presentation. Two seminars often utilize video feedback and critique.

Although it does not now reach the college's current expectation for writing intensity, Introduction to Psychology includes four writing assignments that serve to introduce our students to the information resources in the field. These activities include information literacy workshops delivered by library staff. We discovered in preparation for the retreat that writing at the 200-level, where the bulk of our instruction resides, is less common now than it has been in the past. We offer 17 lecture courses, some alternated over a two-year cycle. Among the six most highly enrolled courses in this group, only two require any writing at all. These six courses account for about 40% of the enrollment in our entire set of 200-level lecture courses. Most of our research seminars and conventional seminars feature writing. The remainder emphasize speaking instead. Completion of a seminar is a requirement of the major.

Of the specific curricular goals identified by the faculty which would be furthered within the major? (see page 8 of the Smith catalog for further examples)

- **Develop the ability to think critically and analytically and to convey knowledge and understanding**
- **Develop historical and comparative perspectives**
- **Become an informed global citizen**

We have substantially revised a course in one case and are introducing now two other new courses that elaborate the role of culture for psychological processes and behavior. These are Psychology of the Asian American Experience (a 200-level colloquium), Psychology of Oppression and Liberation (a first-year seminar that will also count toward the major), and a seminar on the Hispanic adolescent experience.

Almost all of our courses feature critical thinking, especially the experience of reading, discussing, or writing about the manner in which methodological features of research affect the conclusions drawn by the experimenters.

Has the department integrated the development of student research abilities in the structure of the major? For instance, is there an information literacy program in place for students who major in the department? Is there a research methods course recommended for your majors (either in your department or another one)? If so, when in the student's career does she take this course?

Our information literacy program begins in Introduction to Psychology, a course that has been enrolling about 140 to 145 150 students per year.

Methods are the cornerstone of the major. Beginning students must complete two courses, research design and statistics, typically during the sophomore and not later than the junior year.

Psychology faculty average more than 6 research students each per year through a combination of special studies, honors, AIMES, Stride, paid student research jobs, and

volunteer student research assistants. Because some of these students work with faculty on research over more than one semester, there still are insufficient opportunities for every major. In order to allow all of our majors one-on-one research experiences, we would have to consider limiting students to a semester of collaboration, something most of us are loath to do. We have taken steps to increase the number of Honors Theses sponsored by the department and are achieving a modern record this year.

Are the pathways through the major clear for prospective majors? Is the department satisfied with the level of advanced work accomplished by its majors? (It may be useful to review the transcripts of graduating majors, or to examine the course taken patterns of several recent groups of senior majors.)

Our curriculum is divided among five tracks: (1) Brain & Cognition, (2) Health & Physiology of Behavior, (3) Culture & Development, (4) Clinical & Abnormal, & (5) Social, Personality, & Gender. Majors must achieve both depth in one of these tracks and breadth across at least four of them.

What are the culminating or capstone experiences for students in your major?

All of our majors complete either a research seminar or a conventional seminar which provides a capstone experience in the senior year. In rare cases a special studies may be substituted.

Please attach a summary of any proposed changes to be considered by the department and any associated timeline for changes to be submitted to CAP.

Because we had not exhausted our retreat budget after this nearly day-long episode, we were allowed to use the remaining funds to hold a retreat-like discussion session with our colleagues from several other science departments who participate in the Neuroscience Program. We fruitfully discussed the range of issues on all of our minds as we search to replace Stephan Bodnarenko, a key, former participant in the Neuroscience Program.