

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Department of Psychology

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
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CAMPUS VISIT
February 14 – 16, 2018

The review team read the self-study written by faculty in the Psychology Department, reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

The committee gave the Psychology Department an overall rating of GOOD. They noted that the department holds “impressive strengths, foremost among which are the quality and commitment of its faculty,” who are “deeply concerned about student progress.” However, while the department “has the potential to become truly exemplary”, reviewers felt that “weaknesses in the functioning of the department as a whole” (i.e. “limited space,” “inadequate equipment and technology support,” “advising loads heavier than at comparable institutions”) prevent it from “achieving what it has the potential to achieve.” The report provides observations and recommendations for strengthening the “everyday functioning of the Department, [as well as its] long-term planning.”

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- A Psychology degree “signals education in writing, oral presentations, and quantitative reasoning [and is a] valuable, flexible, credential.” As such, “it behooves the University to ensure that their degree is the best that it can be.”
- The current number of faculty in the department is “barely adequate” for the number of students in Psychology, given “the substantial increase in majors” over time, “the current curriculum structure, and the large size of the department “relative to other departments in the college”
- The percentage of courses taught by adjunct faculty, “approaching 50%,” is “striking in contrast to national trends, and problematic.”
- Students “report substantial variation across sections” of several introductory courses, namely Research Design and Writing in Psychology, and “are frustrated with this variation.”
- In general, the “Writing in Psychology course seems problematic,” “does not seem to consistently serve its intended function,” and requires substantial fixes, including (but not limited to) a “standardized curriculum or set of content expected to be mastered that is specific to psychology majors.” Reviewers noted that “our understanding is many, if not all sections of this course are taught by faculty in the rhetoric program,” and that “it seems unrealistic to expect instructors who are not in the field of psychology to be able to teach psychology-specific writing well, especially when it comes to the ever-evolving conventions” of the field.
- The choices the department has made, in terms of emphasis [within curriculum], are “justifiable and in

keeping with developing scholarship.”

- Reviewers commended Department faculty for working to address issues of diversity in each of their classes, but noted that “students [raised issues] related to the lack of specificity and depth of consideration of diversity issues – e.g., ‘we need professors to go beyond telling us that there are differences in X among ethnic groups, to talking about what those differences are.’”
- Students and faculty are “hampered in reaching their goals by the current structural encumbrances forced upon them by university procedures and restrictions and the absence of substantive space as a department to reflect on department mission, goals, vision, and planning. Reviewers felt that the “level of stress around this issue” is “perhaps the biggest obstacle the department faces in realizing its potential.”
- Reviewers cautioned that there is the potential of “slow deterioration of morale that happens when good people work in an environment that is chaotic or unsupportive,” and stressed a need for attention from “the College and University” towards structural issues like “limited space, inadequate equipment and technology support.” Additionally, while the Department has “exemplary” faculty that provide the Department great potential, “it does not have enough of those faculty.”

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program’s quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

Curriculum and Assessment

- Develop a model of an ideal set of courses for a four year curriculum, “to identify particular areas where problems in staffing, scheduling, and overall coherence arise”
- Continue to expand assessment of the Research Design course – “assessment of student learning .. provides valuable information for ongoing evaluation efforts and ‘fine-tuning’ of courses,” and could help to “improve and standardize” sections of this course.
- The program’s Writing in Psychology course currently varies “enormously and in ways that are detrimental to both students and faculty” and needs substantial help. At minimum, the course requires the development of a “standardized curriculum or set of content expected to be mastered” across its various sections. Ideally, all sections should also be taught by instructors “in the field of psychology” and are up to date with current APA style guidelines and conventions, as well as “variations depending on sub-field of psychology and journal type.”
- The review team expressed concern that “while there is a diverse slate of courses listed in the curriculum, the frequency with which a number of these courses may in fact be rare.”
- Similarly, reviewers suggested the Department consider the “challenges or potential disadvantages” of offering “a large set of quite specialized [ART and ARM courses given limited number of faculty and classroom space: students “have to be quite lucky to find an ARM/ART section in any given semester (or year) that fits with their interests and overall plan for fulfilling the requirements of the major, and the lack of specificity limits students’ availability to plan ahead to take a course matching their interests.”
- Clearly articulate diversity goals within curriculum content.
- Conduct assessment of course content “related to diversity across the curriculum” beyond “anecdotal information about what students are learning and internalizing.”
- Increase check-ins with students in Psychology Practicum about their perceptions of the program and “the extent to which the content and skills learned in their classes are brought to light in their practicum experience(s).”
- Consider tailoring some upper-level courses to “build systematically upon the base provided by the breadth courses, allowing for more advanced study of topics” previously introduced.

Faculty and Staffing, Departmental Morale

- Retain existing full-time positions soon to be vacated by retirements, to avoid an “inevitable decline in quality of the psychology major” should they be lost.
- The committee strongly recommended considering “at least one more additional hire.”

- The Department and Dean's Office should work together to review the use of adjunct faculty "to see if there might be a way to convert some of the resources expended there towards Full Time or Tenure-Track hires." The committee felt that the department's current reliance on adjunct faculty "is problematic."
- Utilize curricular planning to identify the "most pressing curricular needs" and advertise for new positions accordingly. "Work needs to begin immediately" on this front.
- Think strategically about new positions, as related to curriculum needs, and begin by "jettisoning as much baggage as possible from previous contentious discussions." The committee cautioned that the Department should not be "unduly influenced by previous definitions of positions," but should instead fill "obvious gaps" in areas where the department offers few or no classes (i.e. personality psychology, clinical/developmental psychology, social/developmental psychology, community/organizational psychology, etc.)
- Create opportunities for "informal interaction" among faculty, to build community and collaboration.
- Develop a "sustainable succession plan for the Chair position beyond the next six years," to avoid further more of "what can be justly called chaos associated with so many transitions in department chair" during past years
- Build an enduring Department infrastructure that involves "all of the faculty (junior and senior) in rotating positions over time," in at least "two standing committees: a Curriculum and Scheduling Committee, and a Strategic Planning Committee – [these] correspond to what we see as the department's most pressing needs."
- A Curriculum and Scheduling committee, specifically, can help form "viable solutions that could evade any single person, but could arise from sustained engagement among several people," and will also over time, teach all members of the Department the nuances of scheduling *without* the "steep and daunting learning curve" constant turn-over tends to yield.
- The College should reconsider its "unnecessarily restrictive" requirement that "instructors find specifically qualified individuals to fill in for their classes in order to miss a class to attend a conference or other professional opportunity, and that the qualifications of [said individual] be vetted by the College" – rather, "there are other ways to make up classes, such as using pre-recorded lectures, or having students engage in pre-planned activities that they can run themselves."

Balancing personnel needs with space and equipment restrictions

- Audit available space, upon planned retirements, "to consider possibilities for locating new hires" – in terms of offices as well as research labs and classrooms.
- Consider replacing computing labs equipped with desktop computers with "rooms set up for laptops, which can increase "the flexibility of space previously dedicated to desktop terminals" – a response to "space limitations" and also a recognition that "space dedicated to single uses/single researchers can quickly become obsolete."
- Consider adopting open source statistical software "such as R" to combat "logistical hurdles in terms of software access" with licensed software (e.g. SPSS)
- Invest in upgrading, and "moderate re-design" of Department space "in order to accommodate the needs of new hires" as well as current faculty and students – "it will be hard to attract and keep high quality researchers if they do not have adequate space in which to do their work."
- Keep in mind space restrictions when choosing among applicants for new positions: "it may be possible to find people whose research is primarily located off-campus, or relies heavily on data collected via the internet." Such candidates "presumably would not require very much on-campus research space" yet might still be able to engage student research assistants.
- "If the University wants to see the Department reach its considerable potential," it should increase IT support for, and communication with, Departments such as Psychology.

Improving transparency/information flow within the Dept., between Dept. and College

- Decentralize major tasks from sole responsibility of the Chair to the responsibility of standing committees working with the Chair, to "increase transparency and increase collective involvement in the Department"
- Build "a new infrastructure" within the Department that prioritizes "more public interactions that involve more frequent communication with one another" over "mass communications (e.g., email announcements) [that are] often lost in the noise [and may contribute to] incorrect assumptions about who is talking to whom about what."

- Involve the Department Chair in negotiations between the Dean’s Office and faculty members in the Department concerning service outside of the Department, so that the Chair does not have to “scramble at the last minute to accommodate unanticipated holes in the curriculum or other roles in the department.”
- Ensure transparency when it comes to “the assignment of departmental service within the department” – a theme echoed “from the last visit report.”
- Combat misconceptions that “departmental service does not ‘count’ for tenure or promotion”
- The College should clarify that there is “considerably more flexibility possible in scheduling than faculty members believe there to be,” especially given the perception of scheduling as “monumental and stressful” within Departments.
- Both the College and Department “need to have the same understanding of what restrictions are operating as the College moves ahead,” and should communicate better around these.
- The College should reconsider what reviewers characterized as its “‘one size fits all’ model of Chair compensation,” given the size of the Psychology Department.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?

a) *Recruits and retains a richly diverse mix of students, faculty and staff so that the university community, as much as possible, broadly resembles the world to which students will contribute*
 Reviewers commended the “embodiment of diversity among the faculty” and called it “a clear strength of the department.” They noted that “students talked, eloquently and with considerable emotion, about the agency they get from the availability of role models among the faculty.”

b) *Creates structures, programs, and courses that engage differences of persons, perspectives, and opinions so that students appreciate the commonality of our humanity as well as what distinguishes individuals and groups within the human family.*
 The department “emphasizes the importance of and expects attention to issues of diversity,” and its “commendable” diversity goals “were established well before this became a focus in other departments across the country. However, “for that reason, one would expect the department to be further along in its implementation and assessment of diversity and inclusion in the curriculum.” Reviewers suggested that the department “continue to work towards incorporating diversity into its curriculum in more thorough, intentional, and creative ways.”

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

Reviewers noted that the Psychology Department’s mission aligns well with the University’s mission, “as it reiterates the fundamental aspects of preparing students to serve others and their communities, while adding in goals that are specifically relevant to a psychology program.” Additionally, the review team was “impressed by the faculty’s dedication to the mission of the University, and to the students in department,” who they “serve well.” Students are “extremely appreciative of the high-quality teaching they receive, the Jesuit *cura personalis* they experience from faculty, and the opportunities available to them in the major. Should the department develop a specific strategic plan for the future, address “issues involving departmental governance,” and receive “support from the College and University,” the Department will continue to offer “the high quality major [it does]” as well as build “a strong infrastructure that will serve it [and students] well over many years.”

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?

The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the full-time faculty of Psychology and discuss the Action Plan based on the *Self Study* and the *External Reviewers’ Report*. Based on the agreed upon Action Plan, the Office of the Provost can assist the program by: retaining existing faculty lines in the department after

planned retirements take place; considering the creation of at least one additional faculty line; and assist in providing updates to equipment, space, and technology support to enrich students' education.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.