BIENNIAL PROGRAM STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM – ASSESSMENT COMPLETED IN AY2023-2024 (Due to the dean on November 15)

Submission date: 11/15/2024

Assessment Plan covered in this report: Psychology BA/BS

College: College of Arts and Sciences

Campuses where the program(s) is delivered: ☒Anchorage ☐KOD ☐KPC ☐MSC ☐PWSC

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1. **Please list and number the Program Student Learning Outcomes your program assessed in the past academic year. For each outcome, indicate one of the following: Exceeded faculty expectations, Met faculty expectations, or Did not meet faculty expectations.**

   1   A broad knowledge of contemporary psychology.
   Met the expectation.

   2   Be able to demonstrate skills in research design and data analysis
   Failed to meet the expectation.

   3   Have experience conducting psychological research
   Met the expectation.

   During the past 2 years, 18 students presented their research at the Behavioral Sciences Conference of the North (BSCN), the Department of Psychology's undergraduate students research conference. Some of these students also presented in professional conferences outside the UAA. Further, there are some more students who are involved in research projects as research assistants. This meets our expectations of students participating in research activities even though not strongly.

   4   Be prepared for advanced study in psychology and related disciplines.
   Met expectation.

   We had at least 18 Psychology students accepted into graduate programs in the past two years, of which at least two were into prestigious Ph D programs in the Lower 48 states. Others were accepted into Ph D or Master's programs in Clinical Psychology at UAA. This represents close to 20% of graduates in the past 2 academic years. Further, this is based on somewhat incomplete data because the information is gathered via informal communication between faculty and students (students notify faculty who wrote letters of recommendation); the actual count is likely to be higher. Given the overall acceptable level of performance in

the exit exam, and the acceptance rate of our graduates to graduate programs, this met the expectation.

2. **Describe what your assessment process was last year for these Program Student Learning Outcomes, including the collection of data, analysis of data, and faculty (and other, e.g., advisory board) conversations around the findings.** *(1000 words or less)*

Of the four Learning Outcomes, the first one (broad knowledge) is based on: 1) overall performance on a standardized exam taken right before the student's graduation; and 2) graduate school acceptance rate. There are 8 topic areas in the exit exam: abnormal psychology, developmental psychology, experimental design, learning and cognitive psychology, personality psychology, physiological psychology, social psychology, and statistics. A student's performance level in a given area is indicated as a percentile rank based on a reference group of 5016 students from a nationwide sample during the most recent 6-year period. The recent discussion among the faculty on the use of exit exam focuses on the possibility that the exit exam performance may underestimate (as opposed to overestimate) the students' mastery level of knowledge on psychology. This is because the measure's validity is based on an assumption that students put forth an effort to show their ability and potential. On the contrary, recent data indicate that some significant number of students may not be putting in much effort. This is based on the finding that multiple students had a score lower than 5 percentile rank, which is very unlikely given the student's GPA. The faculty discussed various methods to address this concern, including setting a specific threshold score as a graduation requirement, and or recording the exit exam score on the student's transcript. At this stage, we are focusing on improving students' understanding of the importance of the exit exam, hence, encouraging them to put forth an effort to realize their full potential. The second learning outcome (skills in research design and data analysis) is assessed based on: 1) performance on the two subtopics (experimental design and statistics) of the exit exam, and 2) the number of students having research presentations, thesis, and individual research projects. Faculty reported the number of students involved in research projects by counting research presentations, theses, publication, registration to independent research courses, and research assistantships. Faculty discussed a declining trend in exit exam scores on experimental design and statistics, and its possible linkage with limited participation in hands-on research experience due to the popularity of online research methods lab as well as the decrease in the number of faculty having active research projects for undergraduate students due to workload allocation. The third learning outcome (experience in conducting research) is assessed based on students' engagement in independent research as well as the production of research presentations, and research assistantship. Faculty discussed the experience of supervising undergraduate research activities as well as students' research presentations. The fourth learning outcome (preparedness for advanced study in psychology) is assessed based on exit exam performance, research presentations, engagement in research activities, and acceptance to the graduate program. While the exit exam score is based on a summary report issued by the testing company, the other measures (research presentation, engagement in independent research, graduate school acceptance) are based on the data identified in the discussion

among the faculty members during both informal conversations and more structured discussions in meetings.

3. What are the findings and what do they tell the faculty about student learning in your program? *(1000 words or less)*

The finding is indicative of some uncertainties in students' learning performance relative to the program learning outcome. First, regarding the broad knowledge of contemporary psychology, the exit exam scores across the 8 topics during the year of 23-24 is in the 59th percentile based on the national sample. This is an acceptable level of performance. Further, this is an improvement from both 21-22 (50th) and 22-23 (43rd). To consider some fluctuation across 22-23 and 23-24 due to errors, we computed a weighted average across the two periods. The weighted average is the 52nd percentile which is acceptable. A concern, however, is a variability of performance across the 8 subtopic areas, particularly the two subtopics, Experimental Design, and Statistics, with lower scores. Exit exam scores for Experimental design and Statistics are in the 47th and 46th percentile respectively for 23-24. While the exit exam scores in these two subtopics improved from 22-23, which should be celebrated in our mind, the low-level performance (< 50th percentile) appears to have become more of a chronic trend since AY18-19 for various reasons (changes in types of students, increased online courses, COVID). While the high 40th percentile performance is acceptable as an average for all the graduates, we are somewhat concerned that this declining trend in research related skills is in part due to a decline in students' research activities as observed by the volume of research presentations and engagement in independent research projects. Fewer and fewer students presented in the BSCN (undergraduate research conference). The number of PowerPoint presentations was about 5 and the number of poster presentations was nearly non-existent in AY23-24. This is a significant decline from the period in which at least 10 oral presentations and another 10 poster presentations occurred in the BSCN (prior to 2018). Thus, these two phenomena, which are the decline in the exit exam scores on Experimental design and Statistics on the one hand, and the significant decrease in the number of presentations and engagement in independent research, are likely to be related. One possibility is that knowledge on experimental design and statistics may be difficult to acquire without hands-on experience in research projects. Further, given the lower number of students engaged in individual research projects, the faculty is also concerned that the third program outcome (experience in conducting research) may not be fully met. While a small number of selective students are engaged in independent research projects with faculty's supervision, they are rather an exception than a norm in BA/BS students majoring in psychology these days. Finally, regarding graduate school acceptance, at least 18 students were accepted to some graduate programs during the past two years (22-24). Of the 17 students, two were accepted to the Ph. D. program in the UAA, and 10 were accepted to MS clinical Psychology in the UAA. This means nearly 20% of the graduates were accepted to some graduate programs, which is a respectable outcome.

4. **Based on the findings, did the faculty make any recommendations for changes to improve student achievement of the Program Student Learning Outcomes?** Yes

    i. **Please describe the recommended action(s), what improvements in student learning the program hopes to see, the proposed timeline, and how the program will know if the change(s) has worked. If no recommendations for changes were made, please explain that decision.** *(1000 words or less)*

    This recommendation is aimed at improving research skills and knowledge as well as having experience in conducting research. Although the exit exam scores have improved, we believe that we can do better. To this end, there are two specific recommendations: 1) increased effort on the part of program faculty to recruit students into independent research activities; and 2) some systematic curricular changes in PSY261 Lab that provides hands-on research simulation in the classroom setting to all the students going through the BA/BS program. The detailed implementation plan is described below.

    Program faculty recognizes that one underlying factor that contributed to the decline in undergraduate student research is faculty retirement and changes in workload among some core faculty during the past 5 years. We saw two research-active social psychologists moving to more administrative work and then to eventual retirement. We also saw another research-active behavioral psychologist moving to a heavy administrative workload as the department director/assistant dean. Thus, during the past several years, we experienced a steady and significant decline in the number and variety of research activities in the department that served as the foundation for undergraduate research activities. This certainly affected research activities among undergraduate students because students need a mentor and supervisor. Currently, the department anticipates the hire of one social psychologist and one developmental psychologist with a research workload during 24-25. We plan to direct these new faculty to engage in research projects that are accessible to undergraduate students to increase student's research experience. In addition, we will work to encourage the current faculty to recruit more undergraduate students for independent research projects to increase experiential learning leading to better research knowledge and skills.

    The second recommendation concerns how the research methods lab (PSY A261L) is currently taught. For nearly 10 years, the research methods lab has been taught by a graduate teaching assistant from the Ph.D. program. While we do our best to ensure the quality of the teaching by the graduate teaching assistants (GTA) with supervision by a faculty during the GTA's first semester of teaching, we acknowledge that this system of supervision and quality control relying on one faculty member may not be optimal due to many reasons (e.g., relative importance of teaching compared to other work as Ph.D. students, changes in modality of course delivery to online asynchronous format which makes it difficult for direct supervision, interpersonal relations). Thus, we recognize the need for refined quality control and supervision.

To this end, it is recommended that the department forms a system (e.g., a team or a committee) dedicated to continuous supervision and monitoring of graduate student instructors teaching PSY A261 (and also PSY A260 possibly). This team is also to evaluate all the assignments given in the course and to help develop assignment projects that improve the student's acquisition of research skills and knowledge. This way, the program can ensure the quality of the teaching in these two lab courses that are likely to impact students' acquisition of research-related knowledge, and also preparedness and willingness to conduct independent research projects. The program faculty monitors the volume and quality of student's research activities (independent research project, research presentations in the BSCN) and changes in the performance on the two subtopics (experimental design and statistics) in the exit exam to continuously evaluate the effect of these modifications.

5. **In the past academic year, how did your program use the results of previous assessment cycles to make changes intended to improve student achievement of the Program Student Learning Outcomes? Please check all that apply.**

☐ Course curriculum changes
☐ Course prerequisite changes
☐ Changes in teaching methods
☐ Changes in advising
☐ Degree requirement changes
☐ Degree course sequencing
☐ Course enrollment changes (e.g., course capacity, grading structure [pass/fail, A-F])
☐ Changes in program policies/procedures
☐ Changes to Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)
☐ College-wide initiatives (e.g., High-Impact Practices)
☐ Faculty, staff, student development
☒ Other
☐ No changes were implemented last year. *(If no options above were selected)*

If you checked "Other" above, please describe. *(100 words or less)*
1. To improve the validity of exit exam results, it was recommended to provide better and more information on the importance of exit exam to students.
2. Allocation and distribution of online and face-to-face teaching across the courses/semesters.

6. **Do you have any information about how well these or other past improvements are working? Are they achieving their intended goals? Please include any data or assessment results that help you demonstrate this.** *(1000 words or less)*

The above point 1 (informing students about the importance of exit exams) was based on a concern that some students appear not to put any serious effort to demonstrate their

potential ability. This concern was raised due to the decline of the exit exam scores across all the topic areas for some extended period of time which coincided with the pandemic, increase in online courses, and online administration of the exit exam. Given the significant and clear improvement of exit exam scores in many subtopics during 23-24, our campaign to inform the meaning and importance of exit exams may be working somewhat positively, encouraging more effort from students. This is likely to improve the validity of exit exam scores to measure student's knowledge. We will continue this effort.

With regard to the above point 2, an increase in asynchronous online courses improved students' access to college education. It also may have contributed to speeded completion of the diploma. However, there appear to be unintended negative consequences of the increase in the number of asynchronous courses. Even with the effort to improve the quality of substantive regular interactions, online teaching appears to be short of achieving the student-student and/or faculty-student interactions that contribute to high-quality learning. This possible negative effect may be more prevalent in courses aimed at skill (procedural knowledge) acquisition such as research skills (e.g., PSY A261 Lab). In addition, the availability of asynchronous online courses appears to take away an incentive to come to the campus, which in turn impedes participation in extracurricular activities including independent research. The program and program faculty are still uncertain, and paying attention to the various data (enrolment, completion, DFW, exit exam score, and research experience) to monitor how a given class being offered as either asynchronous online or in-person affects students' learning in both long and short term windows. Understanding the full impact of online versus in-person classes will take some time.

DEAN SECTION (Due to the program on January 15)

1. **Based on the program's responses above, what guidance and support do you have for the program moving forward?** *(200 words or less)*

   The program should consider reviewing the PSLOs, particularly in light of the reported fact that 20% of the graduates go on to graduate programs as the student learning outcomes seem to be focused on research and the goal of preparing students for graduate school. The program should consider how it is preparing all students for future careers. The program is also encouraged to investigate their concern that asynchronous courses are negatively impacting students research skills and experiences.

2. **Discuss what the program is doing particularly well in terms of its processes for the assessment and improvement of student learning, for example, the use of a common rubric or prompt, a signature assignment, etc.** *(200 words or less)*

    The program is doing a good job in using a national exit survey, one that is broad and covers many aspects of a psychology degree. The report is thoughtful and shows a high level of faculty engagement.

Dean's signature: Jenny McNulty   **Date:** 1/13/2025