Psychology Department

Student Learning Outcomes

Dec. 1, 2014

Program Description

Psychology’s PhD training is divided into seven program areas covering a broad spectrum of topics in academic psychology—Cognitive and Brain Sciences (CAB); Counseling; Clinical Science and Psychopathology (CSPR); Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I/O); Personality, Individual Differences and Behavior Genetics (PIB); Quantitative and Psychometric Methods (Quant); and Social Psychology. All programs focus on training students for careers in research. Two of these programs (Counseling and CSPR) also administer APA-accredited training programs qualifying students as scientist-practitioners. The CSPR program is also accredited by the Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS).

As outlined below, the Department has a common core of goals and methods of assessment for student outcomes. In some cases, the seven program areas differ in their emphasis on the goals, and in their implementation of assessment methods.

Psychology does not admit students for the MA, but we award this degree for one of two principal reasons: the student is leaving the program with an MA as a terminal degree, or the MA is recommended by the program area as a useful milestone en route to the Ph.D.

Goals

Research Excellence.

Research competency is foundational to all of our program goals. In broad terms, we train our students to 1) acquire the skills to independently contribute knowledge to their discipline through research, and 2) to acquire knowledge in their field in sufficient depth and breadth to synthesize and critically evaluate the key findings, concepts, methods and theories that are relevant to their research area. All students are expected to learn pertinent methods relevant to their research and to acquire competency in quantitative
analysis of data. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to contribute to
research by publishing at least one peer-reviewed article in an archival research journal
prior to completion of the Ph.D. or by making at least one poster or platform
presentation at a national or international conference during their Ph.D. training.

We train our students to be cognizant of the diversity of human nature and to
understand how to incorporate this diversity into their research questions and designs.
As a key part of research design, virtually all of our students learn to address issues of
age, gender, race and ethnicity. For many of our students, in particular program areas,
individual differences or group differences (defined culturally, socially, or biologically) or
attributes of special populations comprise central topics in research.

Our students are encouraged to participate in interdisciplinary research, and to
understand and contribute to the many applications of psychological science to human
health, culture and society.

A primary goal of our program is to ensure that students are capable of independent
research, as assessed by the doctoral dissertation and defense. A key element is the
ability of students to complete a substantial research project including data analysis and
documentation of findings in a written format acceptable for dissemination to the field.

There are numerous opportunities for assessment and feedback through interactions
between faculty mentors and students. In addition to this ongoing dialogue, formal
methods of assessment include:

- Initial research-project requirement, completed in the first or second year
  (depending on the program requirement), and evaluated by a faculty committee
  in the student’s program area.
- Written and oral prelim exams assess the depth and breadth of a student’s
  knowledge in a specialty area.
- The dissertation and final oral exam assess the independence and quality of
  research accomplishment.
- An annual progress report, completed jointly by student and adviser (and in some
  programs, reviewed and discussed by the program faculty), is used to assess
  progress in relation to requirements of the students program, the Psychology
  Department and Graduate School.
• Breadth of knowledge across the discipline or related disciplines is determined by the Department’s course distribution requirement, and by the University requirement that students complete a minor or supporting program.
• Competency in quantitative analysis is assessed by ensuring that students successfully complete the Department’s two-course graduate-level sequence in statistics or equivalent courses elsewhere.

Teaching and Mentoring

We train our students to clearly communicate material in their field to a range of audiences. During their graduate training, students are expected to attain competency in classroom teaching and to have experience mentoring undergraduates in research. Many of our students go on to academic careers in universities and colleges where skill in teaching is essential. We encourage students who plan academic careers to engage in the many educational programs offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Teaching competency includes the ability to engage students in learning, and to present to them contemporary ideas in psychology and related disciplines in an objective and critical fashion. Students are also trained to communicate their ideas orally to research peers at in-house seminars and professional conferences.

Teaching activities and conference presentations are documented in the yearly progress reports compiled by each student. Faculty mentors are charged with the responsibility of encouraging their advisees to acquire teaching skill. In addition, all students are evaluated on oral presentations as part of the required prelim oral and dissertation defense.

Beginning Fall Semester 2015, the Department plans to offer a graduate-level course on best practices in teaching psychology.

Service, Engagement and Leadership

Our PhDs are trained for careers in a number of different settings. We place our students in academic and other research, practice and consulting positions in which many become leaders in the discipline. We assess success by tracking placements of our completed Ph.D.’s.
As preparation for their future career responsibilities, students are encouraged to participate as “good citizens” at the departmental, university and national levels. Departmental opportunities include service on the Graduate Student Liaison Committee (GSLC), hosting of students during our annual recruiting weekend, membership on search committees, and attendance at department-wide colloquia and job talks. Some students also participate in peer review of written work within the Department and sometimes for professional journals. Membership in professional organizations and attendance at professional meetings are both encouraged. We have a broad consensus among faculty and students of the importance of developing professional identity and engaging in service.

Professional Ethics.

Our students are expected to learn and abide by a set of professional ethics associated with studies of human and animal subjects. Virtually all students participate in IRB-mandated training in order to work with human subjects. Many students participate in creation and implementation of IRB protocols. Students in our APA-accredited programs have required courses in professional ethics and are expected to know and adhere to the APA Code of Ethics.

Professional training also includes proper documentation and management of data, including appropriate safeguards in the handling of data and an “open-source” attitude toward appropriate data sharing.

Procedure for developing this document

During Fall Semester, 2014, the department’s Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) consulted with faculty and graduate students in the Department’s seven program areas to develop this statement of goals for our graduate program. The main steps in the process included:

- Initial discussion by the full faculty (at the faculty meeting, Sept. 8, 2014).
- DGS meeting with area directors to identify a first set of consensus outcomes and assessments (Sept. 29)
• Preparation and circulation of an initial draft statement for discussion (Oct. 10).
• DGS open meeting with grad students from all areas (Oct. 16).
• Discussion among faculty and students within the department’s programs with feedback to the DGS (latter part of October).
• Revised draft circulated to program area directors and subsequent revisions (November).
• Full faculty review and endorsement (at the faculty meeting Dec. 1, 2014).

**Recurring Review**

Psychology appoints its Director of Graduate Studies for a three-year term. A review of Student Learning Outcomes will be conducted once during each three-year cycle. A procedure for conducting the review, similar to the one outlined above, will be used, involving students, the full faculty and the seven department programs.