

Chapter 8: Undergraduate Discipline Spotlight

Each year the Assessment Almanac chooses to highlight the assessment methods of one Truman discipline. This year features the Psychology Department which recently completed its five year program review. This report will discuss the methods currently being utilized for program evaluation within the Psychology Department.

The Psychology Department has three major goals, which include 1) providing a broad-based education in the discipline, 2) instructing students in the scientific method, and 3) preparing students for success in graduate school and in the workplace. These goals and the curriculum that the department sets are guided by the learning goals proposed by the American Psychological Association (APA), which recommends that psychology curriculum addresses 1) knowledge base in psychology, 2) scientific inquiry and critical thinking, 3) ethical and social responsibility in a diverse world, 4) communication skills, and 5) professional development.

To assess our progress in meeting these goals, there are several assessment tools and sources of data that we use. One of the most important sources of data is our graduating majors' performance on the psychology subject Major Field Test. Students take this test usually during the semester before they graduate. This test assesses students' knowledge of the various areas of psychology; thus, it informs us about students' knowledge base in psychology. This test gives us information about how our students compare to students of other institutions. Because we have students' scores from the past several years, we can also examine any changes in performance.

Another important assessment of students is on their Senior Portfolio. All Truman seniors submit this portfolio containing highlights of their accomplishments. Truman faculty members evaluate the submissions on outcomes such as critical thinking, analytical writing, interdisciplinary thinking, and quantitative reasoning. Psychology majors' portfolio scores give

us information about general skills they gain through their Truman education and how they compare to the general Truman student body on these skills.

In addition to assessing students' learning, we also assess students' experience with the major through the Graduating Senior Questionnaire (GSQ). The GSQ assess students' satisfaction with the major as a whole, accessibility to instructors, academic advising, interactions with faculty, and availability of courses. This information can help the department implement targeted efforts to improve students' progression through the major.

The Career Center sends out surveys to graduates to inquire about graduates' placement, from which we examine the percentages of students who are enrolled in graduate or professional school, or are employed. A limitation of this approach is that some of the graduates do not respond to the survey; thus, the figures may be incomplete.

Finally, the department has created a curriculum map, which helps us to see whether the content covered in psychology courses aligns with the APA learning goals. From this process, the department can spot learning goals that are more weakly covered to be addressed in future curriculum planning.

While the above are our "regular" sources of information that we have relied on for the past few years, assessment tools need not be static. The department has created additional assessment procedures as needed. For example, some students remarked that they did not feel a sense of belonging or community among students in the department. To see if this is a widespread concern, we surveyed all students enrolled in the capstone course. Fortunately, the results did not indicate a general low sense of belonging among the students, and we did not follow up further.

In sum, the department strives to regularly assess and use the assessment results to address any needs among the students. To do so, we use a variety of assessment tools, which may be revised if necessary, to generate a comprehensive understanding of our students' and department's successes and areas in need of improvement.