**Psychology Major Assessment Report**

**May, 2019**

**I. Program Assessment Meetings**

Wednesday, November 28, 1:30-2:30, (Present: Profs. Gagnon & Markowitz). We met for approximately an hour to discuss the goals we set for this academic year and the goals we plan to set for 2019-20, particularly in light of Professor Morfei’s retirement scheduled for end of academic year 2018-2019.

Wednesday, February 6, 1:30-2:30, (Present: Profs. Gagnon, Markowitz, & Morfei). We met for approximately one hour to discuss how PSY 403 Senior Seminar in Psychology went this fall and to plan the senior thesis poster session (part of senior comprehensive exam) scheduled for April.

Friday, April 5, 9-10, (Present: Profs. Gagnon, Markowitz, & Morfei). We met for approximately one hour to discuss progress on our goals for this year, as well as determine our annual psychology prize winners.

Wednesday, May 8, 11-12, (Present: Profs. Gagnon, Markowitz, & Morfei). We met for approximately one hour to discuss our goals for next year, students’ performance on the ETS field test and poster presentations (both part of the senior comprehensive exam), and determine designation in the comps.

**II. Closing the Loop**

Our plan for 2018-2019 included the following:

1. Add a new Research Practicum course to address the need for more hands-on experience in research;
2. Modify the curriculum to better address career planning;
3. Focus on more non-traditional approaches to the field throughout the curriculum; and

4. Focus more on Goal 9, Personal Development, with particular attention to developing empathy, compassion, and ethical behavior. We are including this in our action plan based on our own observations related to student behavior in the previous year’s class. One way in which this is already addressed is through an internship curriculum that Prof. Gagnon has developed with Matthew House in Auburn, NY (an end-of-life care facility). The curriculum specifically addresses empathy. The pre- and post-experience data collected so far indicate huge increases in empathy. We will work on ways to be more intentional about helping students develop empathy and ethical behavior across the curriculum.

Steps taken to address each goal and results:

1. Professor Gagnon offered PSY 365L Quantitative Research Methods in Fall 2018 to address our first item, but it did not run. Although our students have repeatedly asked for more opportunities to engage in research and analyze data, they did not enroll in this course in sufficient numbers for it to run. We believe the semester of offering is a bit prohibitive: most of the students who would be interested in this course are thesising seniors who would be reluctant to take two four-credit, intensive courses in the fall semester. As we revise our curriculum in 2019-2020, we will consider offering this course under a more attractive name/descriptor and in the spring, rather than the fall, when we expect more students (particularly juniors) to enroll. We did have three seniors complete hands-on research projects in other ways, however. Two PSY seniors completed PSY 404 Senior Empirical Research Project in Psychology with Prof. Markowitz, in which they collected and analyzed data from their PSY 403 Senior Seminar research proposal. Another PSY senior conducted a research assistant internship (PSY 390) in the fall with Prof. Gagnon that resulted in a professional poster presentation at the Eastern Psychology Association meeting in the spring. Although not this year, Prof. Munoz has offered Qualitatitive Methods in Psychology in the recent past and the SS 294 course offered by Prof. Renfrow (SOCA) was taken by PSY majors this year who were able to develop proposals that they may very well turn in to senior research projects next year. So, although we have not fully codified research opportunities into the curriculum, there are opportunities that many of our students have been able to take advantage of to satisfy their desire for a more hands-on, ‘doing’ experience. Our goal, however, is to codify this experience into the curriculum more intentionally.
2. We did not make any major curricular changes this year. We did, however, conduct a systematic review of the curricular approaches of our competitor schools to learn more about their approaches as we consider a more thorough curriculum overhaul to be completed in 2019-2020. An overhaul is motivated by a variety of factors, including data from ETS exams and exit interviews (to be discussed later in the document), years since the last curriculum revision, and Professor Morfei’s retirement at the end of the 2018-2019 academic yer.
3. Individual professors have modified courses to include a wider variety of approaches and voices. For example, in PSY 210 Child Development, Professor Markowitz included a unit on racial identity development using *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* by Beverly Daniel Tatum.
4. As we did not make major curricular changes this year, this goal was not specifically addressed. As we consider our curriculum in 2019-2020, we will be mindful about what changes we make and how these will influence the development of empathy, compassion, and ethical behavior in our students, in addition to other program goals.

**III. Examination of Data Collected**

The two primary sources of data collected to assess student learning outcomes were the ETS Major Field Test in Psychology and the Exit Interview; both are required as part of our senior comprehensive exam. The ETS and Exit Interview analyses appear below. The Exit Interview themes are summarized here, together with the questions to which students are asked to respond. ETS does not allow us to distribute the actual test, but the test is a standardized assessment of knowledge in the subfields of psychology, including methods and statistics. ETS provides both normative and assessment data that is helpful in assessing our students’ performance across the national norm.

**A.** **Educational Testing Service Major Field Test in Psychology**

**Methods.** As part of their senior comprehensive exam, psychology majors are required to take the Educational Testing Services (ETS) field test in psychology early in the spring semester of their senior year. The ETS Field Test in Psychology is a comprehensive undergraduate assessment “designed to measure the critical knowledge and understanding obtained by students in the major field of study.” (ETS, 2015). The major field test goes “beyond the measurement of factual knowledge by … (evaluating) students’ ability to analyze and solve problems, understand relationships and interpret material from their major field of study.”

ETS offers comprehensive national comparative data that allows us to evaluate our students’ performance and compare our program’s effectiveness to programs at other institutions nationwide. The ETS major field test provides “reliable documentation for accreditation, student achievement benchmarks, and curricula improvement... (it can be used) in curriculum evaluation, departmental self-studies, and end-of-major outcomes assessment.” Thus, the test is an essential and invaluable tool in program assessment. It helps us prepare students to succeed by improving our curriculum, it can be used to demonstrate the strengths of our program to prospectives and their families, and it helps assure us that our students have mastered their field of study.

For each student, ETS provides an overall score (between 120-200) and subscores (out of 100%) for each of four subject areas: Learning, Cognition, & Memory; Perception, Sensation, & Physiology; Clinical, Abnormal, & Personality; and Developmental & Social. These individual scores are useful for assessing individual performance, but even more useful for assessment purposes are the Assessment Indicators that are returned for the aggregate in six knowledge areas: Memory & Cognition; Perception/Sensation/Physiology; Development; Clinical & Abnormal; Social; and Measurement & Methodology. All these data points can be compared to the national comparative data that are based on 28,272 test takers from 314 domestic institutions that administered the test from September 2014 through June 2018.

**Results.** The mean test score for the 2019 Wells cohort was 145 (out of 200; SD = 12), which represents status quo from last year’s mean of 145. This year’s cohort performed essentially the same as last year’s, both with regard to the Wells average and in comparison to the national average (156). While 50% of the national cohort scored below the mean of 156 (by definition), 74% of the Wells cohort scored below it, which is an improvement over last year’s 88%. Nonetheless, our students continue to underperform compared to their peers across the country.

Examining a more fine-grained analysis of the data, we can assess how the Wells 2019 cohort fared in each of the content areas, compared to the institutional averages across the country. Following are the national individual averages across all 314 institutions (28,272 test takers) from September 2014 through June 2018, the Wells 2019 cohort, the difference between the National Institutional and the Wells 2019 cohort, and the difference between the Wells 2019 and 2018 cohorts.

National Wells Difference Difference 2014-2018 2019 W’19-Nat’l W’19-W’18

1. Learning, Cognition, Memory 55.2 44 -11.2 -2.7
2. S&P, Physiology 55.0 47 -8.0 -.7
3. Clinical/Abnormal, Personality 55.3 45 -10.3 -1.8
4. Developmental, Social 55.2 48 -7.2 +.2

The results show that as in previous years, the Wells cohort performed less well than their peers in other institutions across the nation in every subarea of the field. The difference score increased substantially in the Learning, Cognition, Memory and the Clinical/Abnormal, Personality areas, increased slightly in the S&P, Physiology area, and slightly improved in the Developmental, Social area. Wells is not moving in the right direction against these benchmarks in certain areas, for reasons that will be discussed below.

How does Wells compare in terms of ETS’ Assessment Indicators? Below are the averages (2014-2018) for six Assessment Indicators, Wells’ 2018 and 2019 average for each Indicator, the difference between the National mean and 2019 mean and, in parentheses, the difference between Wells 2018 and 2019 cohorts on each Indicator.

National Wells Wells Difference 2014-18 2018 2019 W’19-Nat’l (W’18)

1. Memory/Cognition 44.9 38 36 -8.9 (-2)
2. S&P/Physiology 52.7 45 43 -9.7 (-2)
3. Developmental 48.3 40 37 -11.3 (-3)
4. Clinical/Abnormal 69.3 65 60 -9.3 (-5)
5. Social 62.6 55 56 -6.6 (+1)
6. Statistics/Methods 53.8 41 43 -10.8 (+2)

The picture is not flattering. Although there are minimal improvements in the Social and Statistics/Methods assessment categories, there are equal or greater decrements in the Memory/Cognition, S&P/Physiology, Developmental, and Clinical/Abnormal areas.

**Discussion and *Recommendations*.**

Since the small but consistent increases in performance on the ETS exam commented upon in the 2017 assessment report, we have experienced equally noticeable setbacks since then. Some of this may be attributed to inconsistencies in critical course coverage due to the timing of sabbatical leaves for three of the four psychology faculty which fell in subsequent semesters starting in Fall 2017, leaving foundational courses staffed by adjunct faculty over a span of three semesters. This may have had an impact on this particular cohort, but this does not explain the generally poor performance of our students both in absolute and relative terms over the years.

There are at least two test-specific explanations and one curricular explanation for this performance that we can think of. The test-specific explanations for poor performance is the relative lack of experience that Wells students tend to have with objective type tests generally and standardized tests specifically. Wells instructors tend not to evaluate performance in terms of multiple choice type tests, and Wells no longer requires the SAT standardized test for admission. Thus, many of our students come to Wells with little to no experience with standardized tests and do not get much more experience with them while here. Second is the lack of incentive for students to prepare (i.e., study) for the ETS field test. While taking the test is required as part of the Senior Comprehensive Exam in Psychology at Wells, there is no real ‘stick’ to perform well, just the ‘carrot’ of possible distinction in the major. If a student is not in the running for distinction (i.e., does not have the required 3.5 GPA in the major), then there is no incentive to prepare for the test or to even try to do well. The very students who are likely to not do well are the very same ones who are dis-incentivized to even try to do well. We have struggled with trying to incentivize students to prepare for the test while at the same time not creating undue stress or anxiety over taking the test. It is a problem with which we will continue to grapple.

The ultimate reason for poor performance, however, is becoming starkly clear: Many of our students do not have foundational background in the material that is being tested because of structural issues in our curriculum. It is possible for a student to get through our curriculum without a core course in any of the five subdisciplines of psychology by taking one of the related but non-foundational courses in the area. For example, a student could take Cognition & Culture to satisfy the Cognitive area requirement yet never hear about some of the most basic of cognitive principles and research from that course. Likewise, a student could take Forensic Psychology to satisfy the Abnormal area and never learn about other aspects of clinical and abnormal psychology. Some of our students took Drugs and Behavior to satisfy the Biological area, but this course has been taught most recently from a clinical, not biological, perspective. Success at diversifying the curriculum has come at a cost for our students in terms of a knowledge base that students at other institutions gain. We need to ensure both if we are to successfully prepare our students for a world and career/profession beyond Wells.

In the coming year, the major will be modifying the curriculum requirements to address these issues, ensuring that all students receive a well-rounded education in psychology, one in which they can demonstrate the first of our major’s goals (knowledge base in psychology) as well as other of its important goals (an understanding of diverse ways of knowing and being). It is our hope that this adjustment will ensure that our students are well prepared for a world and work outside of Wells in both the study and practice of behavioral science.

**B. Exit Interview**

**Methods.** The text of the interview appears below. The students are asked to refer to our Assessment Plan to answer the questions. The Assessment Plan is the same as that supplied with our annual assessment, and is shared with the students at two points in their Wells psychology career: as part of PSY 270 (Foundations & Methods in Psychology) and when they complete the Exit Interview.

Psychology Senior Exit Interview

Spring, 2019

The final component of the Senior Comprehensive Exam in Psychology is an Exit Interview. As with other components of Comps, the Exit Interview is mandatory; your comps grade will not be released to the Registrar until you submit a response. As a graduating senior who has now completed requirements for the psychology major at Wells, we value your input and reflections on our academic program. Please look over the psychology program’s goals, objectives, and outcomes below. After you have read through that material, respond to the five Exit Interview questions listed below this document. Send your answers electronically to Laurie Turo-Butler (lturo@wells.edu). Do not include your name; Ms. Turo-Butler will cut and paste your responses into a separate file so there will be no identifying information in the file that she will send to us.

In addition to the exit interview, we ask that you indicate *in your e-mail message* to Ms. Turo-Butler what your post-Wells plans are -- whether that is graduate school, employment, student teaching, or some other opportunity. Please be as specific as possible (e.g., if attending graduate school, indicate program, degree, institution; if job, the specific position and organization; if Teach for America, Peace Corps, etc., where the placement is, etc.) This information will be forwarded to us independently of your Exit Interview.

Your answers to the questions are due no later than 12pm on Thursday,

May 9. As soon as Ms. Turo-Butler receives your Exit Interview and post-Wells plans, she will send your Senior Comprehensive Exam letter to you *via campus mail* (if you want it sent to another address, please let Ms. Turo-Butler know this in your email). This letter from the major will indicate your comps grade (Pass with Distinction, Satisfactory, or Fail) and will include your score report from the ETS Exam. *Please be sure to respond by the due date, as the Registrar needs our recommendation for graduation shortly thereafter.*

Finally: Thank you – We appreciate and value your input!

Exit Interview Questions:

1. Do you feel that we are adequately addressing all of the listed goals? Provide some context for your answer.  
  
2. Do you have any suggestions for how we might do a better job of addressing the goals?  
  
3. In your view, are some goals stressed too heavily, while others are not dealt with enough? If so, please provide some detail as to which goals are over-stressed and which ones need more attention.

4. Are the goals for the major in line with what you hoped or expected to get out of the major or would you delete, add, or modify any?  
  
5. Please provide any further comments you have about the psychology major at Wells.

**Class of 2019 Exit Interview Themes and Solutions**.

1. Increase focus on **Sociocultural Awareness**. Several students expressed a desire for more focus on non-traditional, less Eurocentric approaches to the field (although a couple asked for less of this). They would like more readings and information across the psychology curriculum. This has been an ongoing theme in our exit interview responses and something we are planning to address with curricular changes and hiring of new Psychology faculty. So far, we have attempted a piecemeal approach of bringing in more diverse perspectives within individual courses. While this is something we will continue to do, a more wholesale adjustment to the curriculum is warranted to fully address this need.

2. Students continue to seek more emphasis on **careers and career preparation**. We have previously sought to address this concern through guest speakers discussing their careers and the practitioner-in-residence program. Again, this piecemeal approach does not seem to be getting the job done. We have also considered how to adjust the emphasis on careers in senior seminar. When we include more time on career preparation, students express frustration that they are not focused on their thesis. When we focus more on the thesis, students later ask for more career preparation. As we revise the curriculum, we will consider a career prep course requirement separate from senior seminar.

3. Students appreciate and enjoy the **Psychology curriculum and faculty**. Many mentioned how meaningful their education in Psychology was to them and how professors across the discipline had influenced them. Students commented that the curriculum had improved their critical thinking skills in particular. That said, they would like to see courses offered more frequently.

**IV. Program Changes for 2019-2020.**

We will continue work that we began this year to overhaul our curriculum to provide students both a foundation in the fundamentals of psychology and its sub-disciplines, as well as a broader emphasis on diverse, particularly non-Western, approaches to the field. We will also be considering how to make career preparation an integral component of the new Psychology curriculum and developing empathy skills and promoting ethical behavior in practice and research.

**V. Action Plan for 2019-2020**

1. Add a new Research Practicum course to address the need for more hands-on experience in research;

2. Modify the curriculum to better develop our students’ knowledge base in psychology and address career planning;

3. Focus on non-traditional approaches to the field throughout the curriculum; and

4. Continue to find ways to develop empathy, compassion, and ethical behavior in students (Goal 9, Personal Development).