

# **Psychology Major Assessment Report May, 2018**

## **I. Program Assessment Meetings**

**May 2, 2018** (Present: Profs. Gagnon, Markowitz, and Morfei)

We met for approximately an hour to discuss the goals we set for this academic year and the goals we plan to set for 2018-19. We noted the need to continue to work on ways to provide students with methodological knowledge. As noted in more detail below, students have expressed a desire for more hands-on research experience. Adding courses back into the curriculum (e.g., feminist methodologies, qualitative research methods, and quantitative research methods) should help to address this issue.

Given the sabbaticals during the 2017-18 academic year (Prof. Markowitz in the fall and Prof. Gagnon in the spring), other discussions of curriculum and assessment were primarily through email communication.

## **II. Closing the Loop**

As noted above, we have begun to address the need for additional student learning in various research methods. Prof. Muñoz taught WGS 310, Feminist Methodologies and Psy. 360L, Qualitative Research Methods, during the 2017-18 academic year. Prof. Gagnon will be teaching Psy. 365L, Quantitative Research Methods, in fall, 2018. As noted below, students continue to seek hands-on research opportunities and more exposure to computer-assisted statistical research analysis.

We are continuing to invite guest speakers to our classes whenever feasible to help students connect their college experience to potential careers. Given some of the feedback we received from this year's exit interviews, however, we clearly have more work to do in this area.

## **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 we require 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. Note, though, that ETS does not allow us to distribute the actual test.

## **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 similar 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 prospective students 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 sub-scores (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 21,020 test takers from 303 domestic institutions that administered the test from September 2014 through June 2017. (The complete National Comparative Data Summary, including the identities of the 303 participating institutions, can be found at: [http://www.ets.org/s/mft/pdf/acdg\\_psychology.pdf](http://www.ets.org/s/mft/pdf/acdg_psychology.pdf))

**Results.** The mean test score for the 2018 Wells cohort was 145 (out of 200; SD = 7.5), a decrease of 7 points from 2017 and somewhat lower than a national mean test score of 156.1 (SD = 15.1). While 50% of the national cohort scored below the mean of 156.1 (by definition), 88% of the Wells cohort scored below it. Last year, 63% of Wells students scored below it. Thus, our students are underperforming compared to their peers across the country. For the past two years, they had been showing improvement in this measure, but this year the

performances were below what they had been. We believe this year’s senior class was weaker than previous year’s academically.

We will now look at a more fine-grained analysis of the data. How did the Wells 2018 cohort fare in each of the content areas? Following are the national individual averages across all 21,020 test-takers from September 2014 through June 2017, the Wells 2017 cohort, the Wells 2018 cohort, and the difference between the National and the 2018 cohort (in parens).

	National <u>2014-2017</u>	Wells <u>2017</u>	Wells <u>2018</u>	Difference <u>National-2018 (2017)</u>
Learning, Cognition, Memory	56.1	55	47	9.1 (1.1)
S&P, Physiology	55.8	54	48	7.8 (1.8)
Clinical/Abnormal, Personality	55.9	49	47	8.9 (6.9)
Developmental, Social	56.3	56	48	8.3 (0.3)

The results show that our 2018 cohort performed less well individually than their peers in other institutions across the nation in every subarea of the field. Additionally, difference scores increased from 2017. In 2017, we were close to national averages in three out of four areas. This year, the students performed markedly less well in those same three categories than in previous years. Unlike previous years, however, this year’s seniors scored consistently across the four categories. Previously, we had seem more variability across category performance.

What if we compare our institutional scores to the 303 other institutions in the comparative data set? In this case, the National institutional mean is 155.3 (SD = 9.3), whereas our mean was 145.3 this year, indicating that our mean is one standard below the institutional mean. Looking at institutional means for each Assessment Indicator, we see the following:

	National <u>2014-2017</u>	Wells <u>2018</u>	Difference <u>National-2018</u>
Learning, Cognition, Memory	55.5	47	8.5
S&P, Physiology	55.3	48	7.3
Clinical/Abnormal, Personality	55.5	47	8.5
Developmental, Social	55.4	48	7.4

This comparison shows that our students average scores were 7-9 points lower than national averages in the four subareas.

How does Wells compare in terms of Assessment Indicators? Below are the averages (2014-20167) for each of the six Assessment Indicators, Wells' 2017 and 2018 average for each Indicator, the Indicators rank ordering in parentheses for each of these, and the difference between the National mean and 2018 mean and, in parentheses, the same difference for 2017.

	National 2014-17 (rank)	Wells 2017 (rank)	Wells 2018 (rank)	Difference Nat'l-2018 (2017)
Memory/Cognition	45.3 (6)	46 (6)	38 (6)	7.3 (-.7)
S&P/Physiology	53.1 (4)	51 (3)	45 (3)	8.1 (2.1)
Developmental	48.6 (5)	48 (5)	40 (5)	8.6 (.6)
Clinical/Abnormal	69.5 (1)	64 (1)	65 (1)	5.5 (4.5)
Social	62.8 (2)	64 (1)	55 (2)	7.8 (-1.2)
Measure/Methods	54.2 (3)	49 (4)	41 (4)	13.2 (5.2)

As we can see, this year's class performed more poorly than last year's, reversing a pattern of improvement over the last few years. This year's class was closest to the national average in Clinical/Abnormal (which is atypical compared with previous years' data), and furthest from the national average in Measurement & Methodology (which is consistent with past performance).

What can the relative rank orderings tell us about the areas that Wells is doing well in? Like the National orderings, our students do best in the Clinical/Abnormal and Social areas (1 and 2, respectively) even though we lag behind the National scores in absolute terms. Where we differ is in the S&P/Physiology area (3), which is better than the National rank order (4) and Measurement/Methodology (4) which is behind the National ranking (3). The Developmental and Memory/Cognition areas follow the National rank order (5 and 6, respectively).

### **Discussion and Recommendations.**

We are disappointed by this year's performance, especially compared with a couple of years of progress toward the National comparative yardsticks. In the past, the content area with the greatest room for improvement was in the Clinical/Abnormal/Personality content area. We accounted for this by the fact that our curriculum is designed to provide a broad-based approach to psychology and not focus so much on clinical/counseling as other programs (represented in the National comparative data), that we decided to eliminate the Personality course, and that our curriculum allows students to satisfy the requirement in this area in non-traditional ways that are not tested in standardized testing (e.g., by taking Forensic Psychology or Indigenous Psychologies). This year, we saw comparably low scores across the four

subareas, such that Clinical/Abnormal/Personality was similar to the others. This may be an indication of an overall weaker senior class in Psychology this year. In the assessment indicators, in addition to disappointingly low scores, we were surprised that Clinical/Abnormal was the closest to the national average. Statistics/Methods was the furthest. During her Spring 2018 sabbatical, Professor Gagnon developed an advanced research methods class. We are hoping to get students to take this class, and that this will improve their scores on this assessment indicator. Depending on how this course influences performance (as we consider a name and semester change, based on disappointing Fall 2018 enrollment), **we should consider offering a two-semester Statistics and Research Methods course for Psychology or the Social Sciences in the future.** We are hopeful that this year's poor performance is a blip and not the start of a downward trend in performance on this exam. **We will consider how we discuss the exam with students so that they take it seriously, but without causing them undue anxiety,** in what is a relatively unfamiliar testing situation for Wells students.

## **B. Exit Interview**

The text of the interview appears below. The students are asked to refer to our Assessment Plan to answer the questions. Although the Assessment Plan is not included below, it is sent to the students for their reviews they complete the interview.

### **Psychology Senior Exit Interview Spring, 2018**

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 (lturo@wells.edu).** Do not include your name; Ms. Turo 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 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 **4:30 on Friday, May 4**. As soon as Ms. Turo 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 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!**

**(As noted above, the Assessment Plan is included with the Exit Interview.)**

### **Exit Interview Questions:**

1. Do you feel that we are adequately addressing all ten 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 ten 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 2018 Exit Interview Themes and Solutions**

1. Increase focus on Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness. Several students expressed a desire for more focus on non-traditional, less Eurocentric approaches to the field. They would like more readings and information across the psychology curriculum.
2. Students are looking for more information on the history of psychology. In addition to addressing this in Psy. 101, General Psychology, and Psy. 270, Foundations and Methods, we can be more intentional about including historical perspectives throughout the curriculum. This would also provide an excellent opportunity to discuss how the historical, Eurocentric perspective was not inclusive (see #1 above).
3. Students continue to seek more emphasis on careers and career preparation. We could increase the number of guest speakers to our classes and specifically ask them to discuss their own career paths. We could increase the focus on

careers in the senior seminar, and we might even consider adding a course in the spring of the junior year on career development.

4. Students want more hands-on research opportunities. We are trying to address this by reinstating courses such as WGS 310, Feminist Methodologies; Psy. 360L, Qualitative Research Methods, and Psy. 365L, Quantitative Research Methods. We plan to propose a new Research Practicum in Psychology course in the fall.
5. Students felt that their knowledge of statistics was lacking. They also expressed a desire for more knowledge in computer-assisted data analysis. The use of data-analysis software could be incorporated into statistics classes or could be addressed in hands-on courses described above.

#### **IV. Program Changes for 2017-18**

As stated above, we will propose a new Research Practicum in Psychology course in the fall. This will provide a new opportunity for students to do hands-on research, a need that has been expressed over the past few years. Pending the approval of the course, Prof. Gagnon will include this in her regular rotation.

#### **V. Action Plan for 2018 - 19**

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. 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Milene Z. Morfei, Ph.D.  
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