

Psychology Annual Assessment Report 2014

I. Executive Summary Statement

The psychology major focused on three goals from the psychology assessment plan that had been selected last year for modification and/or study in 2013-2014, including: 1) assessment of majors' knowledge base for the field of psychology (Goal 1); 2) research methodology preparation and proficiency (Goal 2); and 3) preparing students for their paths beyond Wells (Goal 10). In conducting this assessment, we used qualitative and quantitative measures including two from the senior comprehensive exam in psychology (ETS Field Test; Exit Interview) and a Post-Wells Plans database, newly established to help assess our career/graduate school preparation efforts. Our graduates again did better than their peers nationally on standardized testing. Internally, we also discovered very significant improvements in knowledge base in some sub-areas of the curriculum coupled with no real loss of ground in others, further validating our major curriculum restructuring of 2010. We observed some minor improvement in the Measurement & Methods knowledge base compared to previous years, but students still strongly lament the loss of hands-on research methods opportunities in the psychology curriculum. The inaugural Post-Wells Plans database revealed that all of our graduates have psychology-related prospects in mind and virtually all have confirmed employment and/or graduate school plans in place. This, together with Exit Interview responses, suggests that our graduate school/career preparation initiative in the senior seminar is helping to prepare students for their post-Wells plans. In the coming year, we will focus on resolving the hands-on research opportunity issue for the major, we will more mindfully incorporate career conversations across the curriculum and not just in the senior seminar, and we will continue offering a well-rounded curriculum that provides the solid knowledge base with which our majors leave Wells and that puts them at an advantage compared to their peers at other institutions.

II. Summary of Annual Assessment Review and Planning Meeting(s)

- A. **Date, Length, Attendees.** There were two full-time members of the psychology faculty responsible for major assessment on staff this year (Professors Gagnon and Morfei); they met several times in the 2013-2014 academic year, in meetings of one hour duration each, on the following dates: August 19, December 6, December 23, January 23, March 3, April 9, and April 23. While these meetings were not always exclusively about assessment, assessment issues played some role in each of the discussions. The two faculty mentioned also led a round-table discussion at the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology in January, 2014 in which they shared and gathered ideas about the capstone experience from colleagues in psychology programs at other institutions around the country.
- B. **Topics.** The most intensive topic of discussion focused on the senior seminar and capstone experience. Senior seminar is one of the primary ways in which we both deliver assessment objectives and measure assessment outcomes and we are constantly looking for ways to improve both the deliverables and the outcome. In our meetings, we also discussed

assessment-relevant topics such as reliance on adjunct faculty and support for adjuncts, the senior comprehensive exam, poster tutorial/preparation, and academic honesty/ethics violations in our classes.

- C. **Changes.** Changes we intend on implementing are detailed in *V: Summary of Data: Methods and Results* (see *Solutions*). The *Psychology Major Assessment Plan* has also been updated to reflect changes that impact it, especially in terms of how we will measure outcomes.

III. Action Plan

We intend on continuing our focus on finding ways to deliver hands-on research opportunities for our majors who desire it, which will make them more viable candidates for graduate-level (esp. PhD) programs. We also intend on strengthening our focus on ensuring adequate graduate school and career/occupational preparation. From Exit Interview responses, students both appreciate and desire more opportunities for experiential learning – applying classroom learning to the real world, not just through internships but as part and parcel of coursework. We will discuss ways to make this happen throughout the curriculum. Finally, we will focus on reinforcing Community Standards and Honor Code throughout our courses, as these form the foundation for good, ethical practice and character which are important in psychological practice whether it is as a helping professional or as a researcher. Below is commentary and ‘action plan’ for each of the 10 goals of our assessment plan. We will focus on the bolded goals in the coming year. The psychology assessment faculty (which will add Prof. Sarah Markowitz) will meet in late summer of 2014, to continue development or implementation of these and other actionable items.

Goal 1: Knowledge Base. By the ETS Field Test Assessment Indicators, it appears we are doing well with regard to meeting Goal 1 (Knowledge Base in Psychology), although students desire more offerings in the clinical area (see Exit Interview results in *V*). With the return of our clinical psychology faculty member (Prof. Markowitz) and new offerings in child clinical psych and possibly sports psychology, we should be able to help address this desire. Trauma/Crisis Counseling (and disaster psychology in general) is a relatively new area that has been in demand among our students. We will continue to monitor performance for this Goal, but it will not be a primary assessment focus in 2014-2015.

Goal 2: Research Methods. This will continue to be a primary focus in 2014-2015. The solution will require the efforts and cooperation of all psychology faculty. One action item will be to demonstrate competency of critical analysis of research in the PSY 270 course instead of senior comps. Students find the article critique requirement in senior comps to be somewhat redundant and we agree now that it is a significant requirement in PSY 270. A major focus in meeting this Goal will be to find ways to increase hands-on research opportunities and professional scholarship (e.g., conference attendance/participation for sharing undergraduate research).

Goal 3: Critical Thinking. We seem to be doing well on this count, as indicated by student responses on Exit Interviews and measured through coursework requirements.

Goal 4: Application. Students on Exit Interview indicated a desire for more of this in their courses; we will attempt to implement more opportunities as possible, across the curriculum.

Goal 5: Values. Honor Code and Community Standards violations were disappointing this past semester; psychology faculty will be on alert to enforce and monitor for this in their classes. Ethical behavior, and compassionate behavior, is part and parcel of psychological professionalism. We will meet as a faculty to discuss civility, integrity, and compassion, and how to enhance and enforce it, prior to the beginning of the academic year.

Goal 6: IT and Info Literacy. One student commented in their Exit Interview that faculty assume too much knowledge of students in this regard. We will be sure to not be guilty of this but also, to cover the essentials in classes that require such competencies (mostly all).

Goal 7: Communication Skills. We require students to practice written, oral, and other communication skills in virtually every class. Students are required to demonstrate poster communication competency formally in senior comps, PSY 270, and PSY 290/390 (psychology internship). We will continue these practices.

Goal 8: Sociocultural Awareness. We receive strong grades on this count from students, an improvement from earlier years. We will continue our focus here.

Goal 9: Personal Development. See Goal 4; the same complaint was drawn here and tied to this goal. We will try to address through more real world applications.

Goal 10: Career Planning and Development: A major focus in the coming year. PSY 403 faculty will bolster their efforts in this class along with PSY 101 and PSY 270 faculty. We will ask faculty to touch on career/occupational prospects in *all* of their courses. We will continue to gather post-Wells plans via Exit Interview and discuss other ways in which we can measure outcomes in this area.

IV. Assessment Plan

A copy of the Psychology Major Assessment Plan is attached; the goals/objectives that were the focus of this assessment are highlighted in red with measurement methods indicated in blue. Changes to the previous (2013) plan are indicated in purple.

V. Summary of Data: Methods and Results

In this section, we summarize our assessment methods and results for each of the three measures we collected and examined: Exit Interviews, ETS Field Test, and Post-Wells Plans.

A. Exit Interviews

Methods. As part of the senior comprehensive exam, all graduating seniors are required to provide anonymous responses to a series of questions on an exit interview (see below). Fulfillment of this requirement is guaranteed by tying receipt of comprehensive exam letter to submission of the exit interview. Thus, we are ensured 100% participation rate. The exit interview provides students with a copy of the psychology assessment plan and students are specifically asked to let us know how we are doing on fulfilling each of our goals, so the mapping to assessment couldn't be more transparent. For this assessment analysis, a summary of the exit interviews from this past year were examined to determine what themes emerged regarding research methods and career preparation. We identified 10 Themes (see Results).

Psychology Senior Exit Interview Spring, 20XX

We value your input as to how well we are meeting the goals for the psychology major at Wells. Given your experience as a graduating senior, please look over the psychology assessment goals, objectives, and outcomes (below). After you've read through that material, we would like you to respond to the questions listed below. We ask that you send your answers electronically to **XXX (XXX)**. Your responses are anonymous and a required component of the senior comprehensive exam: **XXX** will check your name off the list of psychology seniors and will forward your responses to us with no identifying information.

Your answers to the questions are due to **XXX** no later than **4:30 on Friday, May X**. Please be sure to answer by the due date, as we will ask **XXX** to identify anyone who has not responded. Again, we value your opinions.

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.

Results. Ten themes were identified from this year's graduating majors; we offer solutions for each:

Class of 2014 Exit Interviews: Top 10 Comments and Solutions

1. **Make Major Goals and Objectives known to majors earlier in their career.** *Solution: The Psychology Major Mission, Goals, and Objectives are now made available to students as part of the PSY 270: Foundations and Methods in Psychology course.* Graduates of our program overwhelmingly felt we succeeded in addressing each of these goals and that none were over or under-addressed, with the exception of Goal 2: Research Methods (see next).

2. **Too much emphasis on research methods** (e.g., required to take both PSY 270 and do an article critique as part of senior comps)... *Solution: We have removed the redundancy of the article critique requirement by removing it from senior comps as it is already a requirement of the Foundations course. In the future, students will be required to demonstrate competency in applying the tools of critical analysis they learn in this course to either a quantitative or qualitative research article by earning a C- grade or higher on the assignment.*
3. **On the other hand, a number of seniors (6) specifically and emphatically lamented that the major does not offer a hands-on research methods course.** This is a consistent complaint in the exit interviews we have conducted ever since we removed the PSY 360L/365L course offerings, and a problem we have been studying and trying to address. Our Environmental Scan of peer institutions in the last assessment cycle confirmed that we do not meet the opportunities provided by our peer institutions in this regard. *Solution: Currently, we advise students interested in a hands-on research methods experience to take SOC 294. While this has been successful to some extent, it relies on faculty in another major and is unsatisfactory as a sustainable practice. We are considering bringing back PSY360L/PSY365L, which are still on the books for just this reason, and/or making a research project a more viable alternative to the senior thesis (PSY 403), and/or offering a hands-on alternative to the PSY 270 requirement.*
4. **Career/Grad School Preparation:** Students embrace the opportunity to be better prepared for life beyond Wells as part of Senior Sem, but expect more information about possible career/occupational avenues earlier in their undergraduate career. *Solution: Make this a more mindful component of PSY 101 and PSY 270 (perhaps reducing coverage of history; see next) and enhanced discussions across all courses and in developmental advising meetings. We are also asking seniors to provide their post-Wells plans and tracking paths to help us better address graduates' needs (see Class of 2014 Post Wells Plans).*
5. **Too much history of psychology coverage across courses.** *Solution: It appears we do too good a job of covering the history of psychology across courses. Perhaps reduce the focus on this in PSY 270 and use the class time here to address career/occupation possibilities instead.*
6. **Wells Psychology Faculty are 'awesome'...** Eleven students specifically said this. They like that we are passionate, and that we each offer something different to the program. We have different approaches, but it's all good. *Solution: None.* The only complaint had to do with one adjunct hire a few years ago that left some of our students feeling unprepared in terms of methodology (which may be reflected in the ETS Field Test score in this area). *Solution: Make good, careful adjunct hires.*
7. **Seniors felt that their knowledge base in psychology was adequately fulfilled via our requirement/curriculum structure.** No real gaps and general appreciation for the breadth of our course offerings and interdisciplinary connections were appreciated, although there were some laments about limited course offerings in some semesters. Specific suggestions seemed to be in the clinical area: Would like to see courses in sports psychology, more in forensic psychology/criminology, crisis/trauma counseling, and a couple students wished they could take the clinical child psychology course being offered next fall. *Solution: Limitations in course offerings usually arise when a particular faculty member is on leave or covering a college-wide course. The only solution to that is to try to fill vacancies as best as possible with similar*

expertise, which we mindfully try to do. We would like to see an applied psychology position created that could bolster our curriculum in the areas of human resource management, human factors, sustainability, pre-health, business, education, sports management, and/or criminology; many of these areas would support current initiatives at the College.

8. **Two students felt we did a good job with applying curriculum to real life, two others felt we could do more.** This was also mentioned in conjunction with the goal of Personal Development. *Solution: There is probably never too much application/experiential learning, so we could try to integrate even more external opportunities via field trips, guests, and service learning into our classes. Another solution, beyond our control, is to offer more applied psychology courses (requiring an applied psychologist, as noted in 7) Nobody specifically mentioned the importance/appreciation of the internship requirement although anecdotal comments seem to indicate this is a very important component of our requirements. Solution: Specifically ask about this in future Exit Interviews to confirm that impression.*
9. **General Comments about Sr Sem/Thesis/Comps (not already mentioned):**
 - a. Grad requirements/comps are excessive. *Solution: We have removed article critique from comps and made it a required component of PSY 270.*
 - b. Sr Sem/Thesis offers an excellent process. *Solution: We've been told this before and are adhering to a structured timeline for draft submissions and other requirements.*
 - c. Summer thesis assignment is appreciated although not recognized at the time. *Solution: We've kept this.*
 - d. Request to increase page cap for thesis. *Solution: Increase the thesis page limit from 20 to 25.*
10. **General comments:** Too much emphasis on APA format; faculty assume too much knowledge from this cohort about IT and Info Literacy – need to not assume so much; encourage taking PSY 270 as FR or SO; we aren't commuter friendly...; Offer the BS in psychology.

B. 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 in the spring semester of their senior year (thus, at the tail end of their undergraduate career in psychology). The ETS Field Test in Psychology is a standardized, nationally administered exam – similar to the GRE field test in psychology but targeted to an undergraduate audience. According to ETS, “the content specifications for the Major Field Tests reflect the basic knowledge and understanding gained in the curriculum. They have been designed to assess the mastery of concepts, principles, and knowledge expected of students at the conclusion of a major in specific subject areas. In addition to factual knowledge, the tests evaluate students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, understand relationships, and interpret material. They contain questions that call for information as well as questions that require interpretation of graphs, diagrams, and charts based on material related to the field.”

The ETS Major Field Test in Psychology is administered to seniors in the major at Wells early each spring semester. The tests are submitted to ETS in Princeton, NJ for scoring and the results are returned for the group as a whole and for each student, broken down into scores for the separate subfields in psychology as well as an overall score. Group averages are provided for the following Assessment Indicators (the terms used in the Wells curriculum structure are indicated in the parenthetical): Memory & Thinking ('Cognitive'), Sensory & Physiology ('Biological'), Developmental ('Developmental'), Clinical & Abnormal ('Clinical'), Social ('Social'), and Measurement and Methodology ('Statistics & Methods'). The national comparative data are provided based on test takers from 325 domestic institutions that administered the test over a four year period (2010-2013), so that we may compare our students' performance to their peers across the nation.

Results. Following are the national averages (2010-2103) for the 325 administering institutions, Wells' 2014 average for each of the six Assessment Indicators, and the difference between the two.

	National (2010-2013)	Wells (2014)	Difference
1. Cognitive	44	54	+10
2. Biological	49	55	+6
3. Developmental	51	58	+7
4. Clinical	62	65	+3
5. Social	59	64	+5
6. Statistics & Methods	54	56	+2

Next are the performance figures for each of the six Assessment Indicators for the Wells classes of 2012, 2013, and 2014, along with value change from 2013 to 2014.

	2012	2013	2014	Change
1. Cognitive	44	44	54	+10
2. Biological	51	48	55	+7
3. Developmental	53	55	58	+3
4. Clinical	64	66	65	-1
5. Social	58	64	64	0
6. Statistics & Methods	53	51	56	+5

Discussion. The results are very encouraging. Our 2014 majors did better and, in some cases, quite substantially better, than their peers at other institutions and did better on almost all Assessment Indicators than their Wells peers in the 2012 and 2013 graduating classes. The biggest gains in both comparative data sets came in the cognitive area, with the biological area not far behind. One might attribute this to the strong interest in these areas by this particular cohort (four of these students pursued the minor in Cognitive and Brain Science). Our students scored substantially better than their

national peers in the Developmental area (a strength of our program is that we offer developmental courses across the lifespan), and are stronger than the national averages in the other areas as well. Comparing Wells cohorts across the three years, we see that the 2014 class outperformed their predecessors in four of the six categories; where they did not outperform, they more or less held steady. In short, our students are demonstrating that they have acquired a good knowledge base in the discipline and across all sub-disciplines.

The ETS results are useful as a general gauge of where we stand compared to our own past performance as well as our students' cohort across the nation and again, it is heartening to see that we are moving in the right direction with our students' scores in *all* of the subtest categories. This suggests our focus on curriculum has had some beneficial impact on students' knowledge base in the field of psychology, at least as measured by this yardstick.

Exit Interview comments lend support to the conclusion that we seem to do a good job in covering all area of psychology. Finally, one thing the ETS Exam does not measure with regard to knowledge base is the diversity of our course offerings, i.e., the breadth of our students' knowledge base. In this regard, we might point out that the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* showcased the Wells psychology program in its review of the College in this year's (2014) Guide, described it as one of the College's biggest assets, and was very complimentary of our program. Student comments about the program as reported in *Fiske* echo what we typically read in our Exit Interviews.

C. Class of 2014 Post-Wells Plans

Method. In conjunction with the Exit Interview, we ask students to indicate their post-Wells plans. From this, we compiled responses into various categories, including types of employment and further education/training they will pursue.

Results.

Below are categorized data and responses. The categories are not mutually exclusive (e.g., some stated they would work followed by grad school) and some are aspirational (e.g., all four PhD plans are aspirational, not yet accepted into programs). Thus, these numbers will not add up to 100%. Fully 71% (17 of 24) of this year's graduating majors have plans for continuing their education/training in some capacity, 42% will initially enter the job market predominantly in psychology-related capacities, and 8.3% will be involved in service opportunities. These latter two paths are largely viewed as 'gap year' activities (i.e., these categories are not exclusive of the first) and indicate that many of our graduates view a year or two of further preparation or employment as necessary before pursuing their ultimate goals.

Entering the Work Force: 42%

- Jobs/placements include potter, teaching, NYC needle exchange and working with foster children or in a hospital setting, Gavras Center (Auburn), Upstate Medical Center/Crouse or

Enable/Cayuga Centers working with developmental disability/autism, clinical research position at Bellevue Hospital in NYC to become a more viable PhD clinical psych candidate, and Mental Health Alliance (Ithaca, continuing from a spring internship experience). Many stated they were pursuing these jobs to save money for graduate school/pay bills.

Service Opportunities: 8.3%

- TEACH Charlotte
- Teach abroad

Pursue Further Education/Training: 70.8%

Certification Program: 8.3%

- Student teaching
- Applied Behavior Analysis Certification (BCBA)

Professional Programs: 8.3%

- Nursing School (Child Life Specialist)
- Police Academy (NYC)

Masters Programs: 41.7%

- Art Therapy (Calif)
- Mental Health Counseling (Suffolk U., Boston)
- MSW/MA Psychology/Public Policy (UCSD)
- Literacy (SUNY Cortland)
- Industrial/Organizational Psych (Florida Institute of Technology)
- Human Resources
- Clinical Child Psychology (Kansas University)
- MBA (Colorado Technical University, online)
- Education
- Forensic Psychology (Chicago Professional School of Psychology)

Doctoral Programs: 16.7%

- Clinical Psychology (2)
- Cognitive & Brain Science (2)

Discussion. One constructive suggestion that we will implement is to more mindfully incorporate career conversations across the curriculum and especially in the Introductory and Foundations courses, and not just in the senior seminar – students still seem unsure of what opportunities are available to them as psychology majors. We will continue to focus on this as an important component of senior seminar too, however.