

Psychology Annual Assessment Report 2015

I. Executive Summary Statement

The psychology major focused on three goals from the psychology assessment plan that had been identified last year for modification and/or study in 2014-2015. These included: research methodology preparation and proficiency (goal 2), enhancing and enforcing civility, integrity, and compassion (goal 5), and 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, to help assess our career/graduate school preparation efforts. From these sources, we identified two goals for continued study and improvement (research methodology and preparation beyond Wells), and one new goal (application). We also determined that the majority of our students plan to pursue graduate study in psychology-related fields, though very few had been admitted to graduate school or accepted a job at the time of the report. This year's senior class had an average score of 143 on the ETS Field Test, compared with a national average of 155. They also scored worse than the past three senior classes at Wells on this exam. There are various reasons for the lower than average performance, and we have some ideas about how to ensure better performance for future classes.

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

a. Date, Length, Attendees

Professors Gagnon and Markowitz met for an hour on August 27, 2014, to discuss assessment and other topics. On Wednesday, October 22, Thursday, February 12, Thursday, March 19, and Thursday, April 23, Professors Gagnon, Markowitz, and Morfei met for one hour to discuss assessment and other topics.

b. Topics

The topics of these meetings focused primarily on senior seminar, particularly how we will accommodate an unusually large senior class in 2015-2016. Senior seminar is one of the primary ways that we deliver assessment objectives and assess outcomes, so we are always trying to improve both. We also discussed other topics relevant to assessment, including the ETS exam, student performance and motivation, poster presentation, adjunct faculty support, and research methods and opportunities.

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.

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 (particularly Ph.D.) programs. We also intend on strengthening our focus on ensuring adequate graduate school and career/occupational preparation. It is clear that students need to take PSY 270 Foundations and Methods early in their career in the major. We have been advising this from the advent of the course, but logistics have sometimes precluded students from taking the course until their senior year. We hope to avoid this in future classes. 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. One way to achieve this will be with the option for seniors to do a team-based service-learning project as their capstone in senior seminar. We hope that this will also strengthen the career development and planning goal, particularly for students interested in a service-based placement or career upon graduation. 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 will meet in late summer of 2015, to continue development or implementation of these and other actionable items.

Goal 1: Knowledge Base. Students report on exit interviews that they have achieved a broad base of knowledge in the different areas within psychology, through the curriculum’s design of requiring at least one course in each of six different areas. Although this year’s ETS scores are weaker than in previous years, there is not one particular area that stands out as worse than others. Some graduating seniors demonstrated a broad knowledge base through high scores on this exam, but many did not.

Goal 2: Research Methods. This will continue to be a primary focus in 2015-2016. It appears that students benefited from the opportunity to demonstrate competency of critical analysis of research in the PSY 270 course instead of senior comps. Students expressed frustration that there were not more opportunities for hands-on research. While two seniors presented their research at academic conferences, one of whom gathered her own data for the project, we would like to find ways for more students with this interest to conduct research themselves. We are optimistic that having Professor Elliott Smith teach MA 151 Statistics this year will offer students more opportunities to work with data.

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. While some students on Exit Interview indicated a desire for more of this in their courses, others appreciated the work that professors do to address current topics and apply principles to real-world situations. Changes to senior seminar will allow students to choose a team-based service-learning project, which will directly apply principles of the major to a need in the community.

Goal 5: Values. While this was a problem area last year, there seems to have been improvement in this area this year. Several students commented in their exit interviews that the major’s focus on values was important to their learning. We hope that the opportunity to engage in service-learning as the capstone project for

Psychology

senior seminar will further strengthen this goal. We plan to continue to monitor this area, but it will not be a primary focus in 2015-2016.

Goal 6: IT and Info Literacy. Students reported that they felt they had adequate instruction and practice at retrieving and evaluating sources using library technology.

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. Several students remarked on Exit Interviews that this has benefitted them.

Goal 8: Sociocultural Awareness. While many students commented that we did a good job in this area, others reported that there is still room for improvement. We will continue our focus here.

Goal 9: Personal Development. While a couple of students commented that they would like more attention paid to this area, others reported that they felt that by the time they had completed their psychology major, they had seen a lot of personal growth related to their coursework and academic life.

Goal 10: Career Planning and Development. Although changes have been made to improve this area, students continue to report that they would like more emphasis on career development throughout their coursework (not just in senior seminar), as part of both their academic courses and through enhanced internship opportunities. By offering a service-learning project in senior seminar, we hope students who wish to pursue service opportunities or careers gain experience in this area that will enhance their skills and employability. We will continue to work on bringing career/occupational discussion to all courses within the major. 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 (2014) 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
 - i. 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. We identified six themes (see Results).

Psychology Senior Exit Interview
Spring, 2015

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 Deb Witter-Gamba (dwittergamba@wells.edu). Your responses are anonymous and a required component of the senior comprehensive exam: Ms. Witter-Gamba 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 Ms. Witter-Gamba no later than 4:30 on Friday, May 1. Please be sure to answer by the due date, as we will ask Ms. Witter-Gamba 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. Six themes were identified from this year's graduating majors; we offer solutions for each:

Class of 2015 Exit Interviews: Six Themes and Solutions

- 1.) **Students want more opportunities for hands-on research.** 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

Psychology

- studying and trying to address. Our Environmental Scan of peer institutions two years ago 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. We are also trying to make a hands-on research project for the senior thesis available to students who wish to pursue it.*
- 2.) **Knowledge Base in Psychology:** 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 requests for a larger variety of course offerings. Specific suggestions included a course in sports psychology and increased clinical options. *Solution: Clinical Child Psychology has been established as a course in the major. We hope to also develop a sports psychology course soon, as well as bring back Drugs and Behavior in Spring 2016.*
 - 3.) **Career/Grad School Preparation:** Students embrace the opportunity to be better prepared for life beyond Wells as part of Senior Seminar, but expect more information about possible career/occupational avenues earlier in their undergraduate career. While there was an appreciation that this was covered in PSY 270, students still want more career development focus throughout all of their coursework. *Solution: Enhance discussion of this topic across all courses, and promote guest speakers when possible. Professors Markowitz and Gagnon co-sponsored an application for a practitioner-in-residence with Professor Easter. We are hopeful that this opportunity will be funded. Focus on career in developmental advising meetings as much as possible. We are also asking seniors to provide their post-Wells plans and tracking paths to help us better address graduates' needs (see Class of 2015 Post Wells Plans).*
 - 4.) **Senior seminar and thesis work is well structured.** We have consistently received this message from students and we will continue to follow this structure for students choosing to write a traditional senior thesis. *Solution: none.*
 - 5.) **On the other hand, students would like to learn more about the senior thesis and comps process ahead of time.** We have tried to keep students informed of the requirements for the senior thesis and comprehensive exams through a Psychology Senior Seminar Globe page. One student commented that the thesis was not as bad as he had anticipated and would have liked to hear from a senior while in another course, like PSY 270. *Solution: In addition to the Psychology Senior Seminar Globe page, we have also created a Wells Senior Seminar in Psychology Facebook page as another way to share information with students, and for students to share information with each other. We are also considering the suggestion of bringing a senior to PSY 270 to discuss the thesis process (and possibly allay anxiety).*

- 6.) **Students appreciate the psychology faculty.** Most students remarked on how much they had learned from each of the faculty in psychology, and that they appreciate our different teaching styles and strengths. *Solution: none.*

b. Educational Testing Service Major Field Test in Psychology

i. 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 can be an essential and invaluable tool in assessing our program. 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 us to ensure our students have mastered their field of study.

For each student, ETS provides an overall score (from 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 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 25,895 test takers from 357 domestic institutions that have administered the test over a five year period (2010-2014). (The complete National Comparative Data Summary, including the identities of the 357 participating institutions, can be found at: http://www.ets.org/s/mft/pdf/acdg_psychology.pdf)

ii. Results. The mean test score for the 2015 Wells cohort was 143 (out of 200), compared to a national institutional mean test score of 155. Only 2 of our 15 test takers scored at or above 155. Thus, overall, our 2015 cohort underperformed compared to their peers nationally. But how did

Psychology

they fare in each of the subareas? Following are the national individual averages across all 25,895 test takers in the 2010-2014 test period, our 2015 cohort, and the difference between the two:

	National (2010-2014)	Wells (2015)	Difference
1. Learning, Cognition, Memory	54	43	-11
2. S&P, Physiology	55	46	-9
3. Clinical/Abnormal, Personality	56	44	-12
4. Developmental, Social	54	44	-10

The results show that our 2015 cohort performed less well individually than their peers in other institutions across the nation in every subarea of the field.

How does Wells compare in terms of institutional averages? Below are the institutional averages (2010-2014) for each of the six Assessment Indicators, Wells' 2015 average for each Indicator, and the difference between the two.

	National (2010-2014)	Wells (2015)	Difference
1. Memory/Cognition	44	32	-12
2. S&P/Physiology	49	43	-6
3. Developmental	51	37	-14
4. Clinical/Abnormal	62	62	0
5. Social	59	48	-11
6. Statistics/Methods	54	44	-10

From this, we can take heart that our graduating class, although weak in most subject areas are nonetheless equal to their peers in the area of clinical/abnormal psychology and to a lesser degree, in sensation & perception and physiological psychology. They perform much less well in all other areas, including, cognitive, developmental, social, and statistics/methods.

How well does this cohort compare to their predecessors at Wells? Next are the performance figures for each of the six Assessment Indicators for the Wells psychology graduates of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 along with value change from 2014 to 2015.

	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	'14-'15 <u>Change</u>
1. Memory/Cognition	44	44	54	32	-22
2. S&P/Physiology	51	48	55	43	-12
3. Developmental	53	55	58	37	-21
4. Clinical/Abnormal	64	66	65	62	-3
5. Social	58	64	64	48	-16
6. Statistics/Methods	53	51	56	44	-12

It appears the 2015 cohort is weak compared to their 2014 peers, again, with the exception of the area of clinical/abnormal in which they performed essentially equivalently to the historical data. This cohort fared the worst in the five year look-back period, having scored significantly lower in virtually every other area.

iii. Discussion. Our 2015 graduating majors did worse and, in some cases, quite substantially worse, than their peers at other institutions and did worse on almost all Assessment Indicators than their Wells peers in the 2012, 2013, and 2014 graduating classes. Only two members of this cohort had overall scores at or above the national average of 155. That means that 13 under-performed to varying degrees. These results are discouraging but must be interpreted by taking into account the particular academic history of this cohort. This group of students represent several cases of students who struggled academically throughout their Wells career, three (20%) who did not succeed in graduating, and several who had medical or significant family/work-related demands that distracted them from their studies. On the one positive side, this cohort seems to be reasonably well grounded in the clinical/abnormal area of psychology.

What do the results tell us? Obviously, to continue the excellent training in clinical/abnormal that our students seems to be gaining – even the weakest students are coming out of our program with a solid grounding in this area. The cohort is not as well grounded in the cognitive area as previous cohorts were, but in this particular group, there was only one cognitive and brain science minor, unlike previous years where the minor was more attractive. The low performance in the developmental area is puzzling, since we have so many offerings in that area, across the lifespan. The same may be true of the social area. We will need to examine whether some students are satisfying the requirements in these areas with courses that do not provide foundational knowledge and whether we should require students to take a foundational course in each area (e.g., social psychology). For a variety of unavoidable reasons, four of this cohort did not take Foundations & Methods in Psychology until the spring semester of their senior year. But the overwhelming take-home message from this cohort is that we need to address the need to provide better support, as an institution, to both academically weak and emotionally distraught students. Students cannot succeed without adequate support services in either area. Another concern are students declaring majors in their senior year because they have not met academic standards in another major; psychology needs to find ways to not be perceived as the major of last resort.

c. Class of 2015 Post-Wells Plans

i. 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.

Psychology

ii. 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., most students had not been admitted to graduate school or found employment when they described their plans). Thus, these numbers will not add up to 100%. Seventy-one percent (ten of 14 respondents) of this year's seniors have plans for continuing their education in some capacity, and 43% will initially enter the job market predominantly in psychology-related capacities. Many of the students entering the work force indicated that they planned to attend graduate school in the future. There are two students of the fourteen respondents who indicated that they had already been admitted to graduate school, and one who had already secured a job. Others reported their plans to seek employment or attend graduate school after graduation.

Entering the workforce: 43%

Job plans include: paraprofessional working with children with disabilities, Crouse Hospital Healthcare Intervention Center, Human Resources Generalist at Liberty Resources, professional sports

Further education: 72%

Graduate school plans include: MA in Global Thought from Columbia University, MA in Public Affairs from Syracuse University Maxwell School, MSW from SUNY Albany, PhD in neuropsychology, school psychology, MA in counseling, MBA, MA in sports psychology

iii. Discussion. We hope to continue to incorporate career conversations across the curriculum at all levels, particularly in the Introductory and Foundations courses. This was a change we had implemented this year, but it hadn't trickled up to this year's senior class. We hope that this focus will be part of the entire curriculum, and continued at the level of senior seminar.