Annual Assessment Summary – B.S. in Psychology

Part One: Summary and Analysis of Assessment Results

During the Fall 2012 semester, the B.S. in Psychology degree program identified five assessment-related activities for the upcoming year. These plans and the results of our assessment endeavors are described below.

1. Continuing our ongoing efforts to enhance the value of the internship course, the internship instructor instituted two changes based on the results of our surveys. First, internship students are now required to have weekly group meetings with both the internship instructor and the other internship students. Students are informed of this requirement, as well as the dates and times of these required meetings, prior to registering for internships, so they will have ample time to ensure that their other commitments do not conflict with these meetings. Both verbal and written comments have indicated that the students find these meetings valuable and productive. Second, the instructor of the course has become more systematic in writing thank-you notes to each site at the end of the academic year. The thank-you notes cover the previous summer, fall, and spring internships and are tailored to each site and based on the students who worked at the site.

2. A second goal involved examining the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Major Field Test in Psychology (MFT) and its utility for measuring the performance of our students. A particular concern is that the MFT is likely to assess content areas in which our students may not have extensive coursework. For example, approximately 20% of the content on the MFT comes from
the content areas of Cognition and Physiology/Neuroscience; however, not all of our students
will take both of those classes, and examination of course enrollments from 2010 to present
indicates that approximately 28% of our students will take neither. Thus, our students’ scores on
the MFT may represent course choices more than actual knowledge gained from their
coursework, raising questions about the test’s validity for assessing our students.

Unlike the MFT, the Area Concentration Achievement Test in Psychology (ACAT) allows
institutions to customize their tests so that only certain content areas are covered. Departments
can select 4, 6, 8, or 10 content areas to include on the test. The content areas available for
inclusion are: Abnormal, Animal Learning and Motivation, Clinical and Counseling,
Developmental, Experimental Design, History and Systems, Human Learning and Cognition,
Personality, Physiological, Sensation and Perception, Social, and Statistics.

The bolded content areas represent topics that are currently required for GSW Psychology
majors and could therefore be used to construct a 4-area version of the test that is not excessively
influenced by course choices. More content areas could be added if we felt we would not be
excessively penalizing students for doing so. Another advantage of the ACAT is that data
regarding content area performance, as well as other factors such as annual gains from previous
scores and correlation with GPA, are provided as part of the standard score report and do not cost
extra. Additionally, the procedure for requesting extended time appears to be simpler than it is
for the MFT, and the cost of the test is slightly lower. We have decided to use the ACAT for the
first time in the Summer 2013 semester. Thus, data from this measure are not yet available.
3. In an effort to ensure that the students develop their oral presentation skills, the criteria and procedure for grading the student-led discussions in the Seminar in Psychology class were revised. Previously, the grading procedure had involved the instructor grading the students and/or the lowest discussion grade being dropped for each student. However, it was felt that having the instructor grade these discussions limited the ability of the other students to provide feedback and think objectively about their own performance in the context of evaluating other people. Additionally, it was felt that allowing the students to drop their lowest discussion grade caused some students to disregard their second presentation if they were satisfied with their first grade. Therefore, in the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters, the student-led discussions were rated by peers. In the Spring 2013 semester, the two discussion grades for each student were averaged rather than the lowest grade being dropped. Additionally, the grading criteria were made somewhat stricter to require students to incorporate classic psychology research in their presentations. The student-rated Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 discussion grades were lower than the Spring 2012 grades, which were rated by the instructor; these means were 16.36, 15.44, and 18.36 respectively (out of a maximum possible score of 20). In the Spring 2013 semester, when the two grades for each student were averaged instead of only the highest grade counting, there were fewer incidents of students not showing up to lead one of their scheduled discussion. We feel that this has produced a more valid assessment of student performance and plan to continue this approach.

4. We had initially intended to assess the History and Systems course in the Spring 2013 semester, but two major transitions occurred that interfered with that plan. One transition was that a new instructor took over the course. A second, and arguably more disruptive, transition was that our department moved to a new building shortly after the beginning of the term. Due to
the move, our materials were packed away and our attention was diverted to the logistical aspects of managing the standard activities of our classes and preparing our students for the move. We will redouble our efforts in this area for the 2013-2014 academic year.

5. Last year, we asked students in the senior capstone course (PSYC 4450) to rate their perceptions of their own critical thinking skills. This year, we wanted to expand on our critical thinking assessment activities and collect somewhat more objective data. In the Spring 2013 semester, students in the senior capstone course completed an assignment in which they were required to write a review of a research article. This assignment was partially intended to mimic the peer review process, which we believed to be useful for our students to learn about, and also to provide a basis for assessing critical thinking skills. Each essay was scored according to a rubric assessing, on a 5-point scale, the objectives of conceptualization, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application. The maximum possible score was 25. The rubric used for our assessment was the same one used in the evaluation of the critical thinking component of the core curriculum assessment. Of the 18 B.S. students in the class who completed this assignment, the mean score on the critical thinking assessment rubric was 12.67, with a range from 6-21. It appears that the dimension receiving the lowest scores was synthesis.

Part 2. Action Plans

1. While the two changes we have made to the internship course appear to be productive, both students and internship site supervisors have expressed interest in having the internship instructor come out to the internship site for a visit during the semester. We will explore the feasibility of this activity given the potential time and distance constraints involved.
2. Because we have not yet administered the ACAT, we do not yet have a sense of how to respond based on the data. We hope that the more targeted content of the ACAT will help us evaluate our curriculum and instruction more effectively.

3. We do not feel it necessary to re-evaluate the oral presentation skills of our students at this time, as we have systematically evaluated this component of instruction several times already and identified what we believe to be some crucial elements of its development. We will revisit this topic in a future assessment cycle.

4. We will continue our efforts to assess our History and Systems students.

5. We will continue to explore appropriate ways to assess critical thinking skills in our students. Although this year’s assessment is an improvement over the purely subjective self-ratings from last year’s assessment, we would ideally like to use an objective measure for this purpose. The challenge is finding a measure that is both valid and cost-effective.

**New Action Plans**

1. This year we will assess the Psychological Statistics (PSYC 3301) course. This course is required for all Psychology majors and is considered to be a standard part of the typical Psychology curriculum. We anticipate that this assessment will take the form of a pre/post measure given at the beginning and end of the term. Two sections of the course will be taught in Fall 2013, and one section will be taught in Spring 2014, giving us ample opportunity to collect data. In addition to examining knowledge gains, we also plan to collect some demographic data,
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particularly related to the issue of whether or not students are repeating the course and/or have previously taken another statistics course (e.g., MATH 2204).

Annual Assessment Summary – B.A. in Psychology

Part One: Summary and Analysis of Assessment Results

During the Fall 2012 semester, the B.A. in Psychology degree program identified five assessment-related activities for the upcoming year. These plans and the results of our assessment endeavors are described below.

1. Continuing our ongoing efforts to enhance the value of the internship course, the internship instructor instituted two changes based on the results of our surveys. First, internship students are now required to have weekly group meetings with both the internship instructor and the other internship students. Students are informed of this requirement, as well as the dates and times of these required meetings, prior to registering for internships, so they will have ample time to ensure that their other commitments do not conflict with these meetings. Both verbal and written comments have indicated that the students find these meetings valuable and productive. Second, the instructor of the course has become more systematic in writing thank-you notes to each site at the end of the academic year. The thank-you notes cover the previous summer, fall, and spring internships and are tailored to each site and based on the students who worked at the site.

2. A second goal involved examining the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Major Field Test in Psychology (MFT) and its utility for measuring the performance of our students. A particular concern is that the MFT is likely to assess content areas in which our students may not have
extensive coursework. For example, approximately 20% of the content on the MFT comes from the content areas of Cognition and Physiology/Neuroscience; however, not all of our students will take both of those classes, and examination of course enrollments from 2010 to present indicates that approximately 28% of our students will take neither. Thus, our students’ scores on the MFT may represent course choices more than actual knowledge gained from their coursework, raising questions about the test’s validity for assessing our students.

Unlike the MFT, the Area Concentration Achievement Test in Psychology (ACAT) allows institutions to customize their tests so that only certain content areas are covered. Departments can select 4, 6, 8, or 10 content areas to include on the test. The content areas available for inclusion are: Abnormal, Animal Learning and Motivation, Clinical and Counseling, Developmental, Experimental Design, History and Systems, Human Learning and Cognition, Personality, Physiological, Sensation and Perception, Social, and Statistics.

The bolded content areas represent topics that are currently required for GSW Psychology majors and could therefore be used to construct a 4-area version of the test that is not excessively influenced by course choices. More content areas could be added if we felt we would not be excessively penalizing students for doing so. Another advantage of the ACAT is that data regarding content area performance, as well as other factors such as annual gains from previous scores and correlation with GPA, are provided as part of the standard score report and do not cost extra. Additionally, the procedure for requesting extended time appears to be simpler than it is for the MFT, and the cost of the test is slightly lower. We have decided to use the ACAT for the first time in the Summer 2013 semester. Thus, data from this measure are not yet available.
3. In an effort to ensure that the students develop their oral presentation skills, the criteria and procedure for grading the student-led discussions in the Seminar in Psychology class were revised. Previously, the grading procedure had involved the instructor grading the students and/or the lowest discussion grade being dropped for each student. However, it was felt that having the instructor grade these discussions limited the ability of the other students to provide feedback and think objectively about their own performance in the context of evaluating other people. Additionally, it was felt that allowing the students to drop their lowest discussion grade caused some students to disregard their second presentation if they were satisfied with their first grade. Therefore, in the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters, the student-led discussions were rated by peers. In the Spring 2013 semester, the two discussion grades for each student were averaged rather than the lowest grade being dropped. Additionally, the grading criteria were made somewhat stricter to require students to incorporate classic psychology research in their presentations. The student-rated Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 discussion grades were lower than the Spring 2012 grades, which were rated by the instructor; these means were 14.89, 17.76, and 19 respectively (out of a maximum possible score of 20). We should note that these figures represent a total of nine students across all three terms. In the Spring 2013 semester, when the two discussion grades for each student were averaged instead of only the highest grade counting, there were fewer incidents of students not showing up to lead one of their scheduled discussion. We feel that this has produced a more valid assessment of student performance and plan to continue this approach.

4. We had initially intended to assess the History and Systems course in the Spring 2013 semester, but two major transitions occurred that interfered with that plan. One transition was that a new instructor took over the course. A second, and arguably more disruptive, transition
was that our department moved to a new building shortly after the beginning of the term. Due to
the move, our materials were packed away and our attention was diverted to the logistical aspects
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required to write a review of a research article. This assignment was partially intended to mimic
the peer review process, which we believed to be useful for our students to learn about, and also
to provide a basis for assessing critical thinking skills. Each essay was scored according to a
rubric assessing, on a 5-point scale, the objectives of conceptualization, analysis, synthesis,
evaluation, and application. The maximum possible score was 25. The rubric used for our
assessment was the same one used in the evaluation of the critical thinking component of the
core curriculum assessment. Of the 4 B.A. students in the class who completed this assignment,
the mean score on the critical thinking assessment rubric was 14.5, with a range from 9-19. It
appears that the dimension receiving the lowest scores was evaluation.

Part 2. Action Plans

1. While the two changes we have made to the internship course appear to be productive, both
students and internship site supervisors have expressed interest in having the internship instructor
come out to the internship site for a visit during the semester. We will explore the feasibility of
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particularly related to the issue of whether or not students are repeating the course and/or have previously taken another statistics course (e.g., MATH 2204).

Annual Assessment Summary-- B.S. in Sociology

A. Summary of Fall 2012 Senior Seminar in Sociology ETS Results

For the Fall 2012 semester, the Sociology program had 7 students that completed the required Capstone Seminar in Sociology course for the B.S. in Sociology baccalaureate degree. As one course requirement, all students are required to take the ETS Major Field Test in Sociology. The ETS is a nationally scored and standardized examination covering nine specific modules and two primary subsets of questions. For the semester, 4 out of 7 students (57.1%) met or exceeded the ETS/Sociology National mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Total (Fall 2008 to Fall 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Students Who Scored at the National Mean or Higher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Students Who Scored at the National Mean or Higher</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
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B. Summary of Analysis of Assessment Results Using Dept’s PLO’s:

*Our Sociology-Specific ETS Standards:*

**Met ETS Expectations:** Within (+/-) 0.5 Standard Deviation Units of National Mean.

**Exceeded ETS Expectation:** > 0.5 Standard Deviation Units of National Mean.

**Did Not Exceed ETS Expectations:** < 0.5 Standard Deviation Units of National Mean.