

Annual Key Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Psychology
B.A. Program in Psychology

Key Assessment Findings
AY 2009-10

Senior Seminar:

Undergraduate majors in the Department of Psychology are required to successfully complete Senior Seminar in the fall semester of their senior year. Class size dramatically increased from 29 students in 2007-2008 to 53 in 2008-2009 and to 65 in 2009-2010. In 2010-2011, the senior class size decreased to 56. The Senior Seminar was substantially modified from previous years, focusing on examining how research helped address psychological “myths.” It remained a writing-intensive course, with 8 required short papers. In addition students completed one formal in-class presentation, participated on an “expert” panel, and composed a group video on a chosen psychology topic. Grades were somewhat higher than last year; total percentage of ‘A’s or ‘B’s was roughly constant, although more of those were ‘A’s (44.64%) and fewer were ‘B’s (46.43%) than in the previous year. The percentage of ‘C’s increased slightly to 8.93%, and there were no failures.

SENIOR SEMINAR RESULTS

Department of Psychology

AY 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010 , 2010-2011

	A+, A, A-		B+, B, B-		C+, C, C-		F		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
2010-2011	25	44.64%	26	46.43%	5	8.93%	0	0.00%	56
2009-2010	24	36.92%	36	55.38%	4	7.69%	0	0.00%	65
2008-2009	20	37.74%	23	43.40%	9	16.98%	1	1.89%	53
2007-2008	11	37.93%	13	44.83%	5	17.24%	0	0.00%	29

Comprehensive Examination:

This year, the Department of Psychology used a single standardized tests as its undergraduate comprehensive examination, the Major Field Test (MFT) in Psychology. “Honors” was given for +1.5 standard deviation above the mean on the MFT. The MFT is taken by a broad range of senior psychology majors across the country.

As illustrated in the table below, total passage rate for 2010-2011 was at 100%, with 19% of those passing with honors. One student initially failed the exam, but subsequently passed. The rate of failure (1 student) was consistent with that for the MFT test of the previous year. After

having adjusted the criteria for passing with honors, that rate decreased from 26% to 19%, closer to the desired target rate of 15%.

On the MFT, students scored above the national mean (85th percentile based on a sample of approximately 30,000 students) a substantial improvement over last year's performance at the 75th percentile. Performance on all subdomains (memory and thinking, sensory and physiology, developmental, clinical and abnormal, measurement and methodology, social) was at or above the 70th percentile. The greatest improvement in percentile was in social, where results moved from the 55th to the 70th percentile. Absolute subdomain scores were all the same as or slightly better than those for last year. So the results reflect, in part, difference in national subdomain performance. Any improvements need to be evaluated cautiously, since it was not uncommon in previous years for some of the best students to take the GRE. Scores for those students are now part of the MFT results.

**Outcomes for Undergraduate Comprehensive Exam
in 2009-2010 & 2010-2011 Academic Years***

	First Try Fail	First Try Pass	Retry Pass	Total Pass	Pass with Honors	Total Pass & Honors
2010-2011 Results (One Common Assessment)						
MFT	1 (2%)	42 (79%)	1 (2%)	43 (81%)	10 (19%)	53 (100%)
2009-2010 Results (Two Different Assessments)						
MFT	1 (2%)	36 (68%)	3 (6%)	39 (74%)	14 (26%)	53 (100%)
GRE Psych	2	6	0	6	1	7
Total 2009-10	3 (5%)	42 (70%)	3 (5%)	45 (75%)	15 (25%)	60 (100%)

*Absolute numbers differ somewhat for the two main assessments, since all students take the Senior Seminar in the Academic Year of their graduation, whether January or May, whereas students graduating in January can take their comprehensive exam in the spring of the previous academic year.

Curricular Improvements

Comprehensive Exam. This was the first year in which all students took a common comprehensive exam, the MFT, instead of choosing between that exam and the GRE Psychology

Subject Test. This new approach avoided the problems associated with student self-scheduling for the GRE, and provides us common data on all of our majors. The criterion score for honors was raised from +1 to +1.5 standard deviations above the MFT test mean. This had the desired effect of changing the honors rate from 25% closer to the target rate of 15%.

Senior Seminar. As in previous years, Senior Seminar emphasized the ways in which research contributes to our understanding of psychological claims and phenomena. This year, there was a major shift in content and course activities. The content was changed to focus on common myths about psychology, such as that we only use 10% of our brain. Students were challenged to examine how research addressed such myths, and were required to write 8 papers on various topics. In addition, it continues to be a goal of the course to foster student interaction despite large numbers, and to help students appreciate different ways of communicating what they know from their research. To that end, the course required each person to participate in a panel discussion, do a formal presentation, and work on a group video. The changes appear to have fostered substantial engagement in the course. Improvement in grades may reflect the many opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning.

Other Initiatives. The Department also undertook several initiatives to improve the overall undergraduate experience.

- The department continued its initiative in developing an UG Senior Thesis. We incorporated a presentation to the annual faculty retreat as part of that process.
- The portion of the departmental web site devoted to undergraduate students was substantially restructured and augmented.
- New opportunities were made available for undergraduate research involvement (PSY 495) with our faculty and off-campus options. Procedures for off-campus research were clarified.
- The plan for *infusing* career development information was updated and has now become a regular sequence across years through presentations in four relevant courses: General Psychology, Statistics, Research Methods, and Senior Seminar.
- A training program was continued within the Department for the General Psychology (PSY201) instructors. Additions were made to a Blackboard site for specific use of PSY201 instructors.