

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

Key Assessment Findings
AY 2011-12

Senior Seminar:

Undergraduate majors in the Department of Psychology are required to successfully complete Senior Seminar in the fall semester of their senior year. In 2011-2012, the senior class size remained the same as in 2010, with 56 majors. The Senior Seminar was similar to the modified approach used the previous year, 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. After each class, students submitted response forms, commenting on the presented topics; these forms constituted part of the participation grade. Grades were somewhat higher than last year; the majority of the students earned ‘A’s (64.29%), with the balance receiving B’s (35.71%). There were no grades of ‘C’ or lower.

SENIOR SEMINAR RESULTS

Department of Psychology

AY 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010 , 2010-2011, 2011-2012

	A+, A, A-		B+, B, B-		C+, C, C-		F		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
2011-2012	36	64.29%	20	35.71%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	56
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 was the second year in which the Department of Psychology used a single standardized test as its undergraduate comprehensive examination, the Major Field Test (MFT) in Psychology. The MFT is taken by a broad range of senior psychology majors across the country. “Passing” was given for a score no lower than 1 standard deviation below the mean. “Honors” was given for a score at least +1.5 standard deviations above the mean on the MFT. The test was revised this year and included slightly more emphasis on Cognition and slightly less emphasis on Measurement/Methodology and Comparative/Evolutionary Psychology.

As illustrated in the table below, total passage rate for 2011-2012 was at 100%, with 14% of those passing with honors. Criteria were not adjusted this year; adjustments are made as needed on a 3-year cycle. Passage with honors was roughly at the desired target of 15%.

On the MFT, students scored above the national mean (80th percentile based on a sample of approximately 30,000 students). This was somewhat lower than the previous year's 85th percentile, but still better than two years earlier (75th percentile). Performance on all subdomains were above the mean, but varied substantially (learning, cognition and memory (78th), perception, sensory, physiology (87th), clinical, abnormal, and personality (83rd), developmental and social (64th). These percentiles were all higher than for any of the previous three years, with the exception of developmental and social, which had been at the 75th percentile the previous year. It is not clear in what way changes in overall or in subdomain performance may have been influenced by changes in the test.

**Outcomes for Undergraduate Comprehensive Exam
in 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012 Academic Years***

	First Try Fail	First Try Pass	Retry Pass	Total Pass	Pass with Honors	Total Pass & Honors
2010-2011 and 2011-2012 Results (One Common Assessment)						
MFT 2011-12	0 (0%)	54 (86%)	0 (0%)	54 (86%)	9 (14%)	63 (100%)
MFT 2010-11	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 second 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 approach gives us a common metric of performance across all of our majors. The shift in criterion score for honors implemented in the previous year provided an honors rate this year very close to our target 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 was the second year in which we utilized a focus on common myths about psychology. The combination of writing, oral presentation, and video preparation introduced last year) gives students a range of ways to explore and describe what they have learned. Student success reflects in part the multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency.

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

- The UG Senior Thesis was continued as an option for the top students involved in research.. A presentation at the annual retreat has now become an expectation of the Senior Thesis completion.
- Additional improvements and updates were made to the portion of the departmental web site devoted to undergraduate students.
- We continued refinements to our *infusion* of career development information at different points in the curriculum. Presentations from Career Services are integrated with faculty presentations. Additional information on Post-Baccalaureate research opportunities was provided to senior majors.
- Our training program within the Department for the General Psychology (PSY201) instructors was continued. There is now both an annual presentation for all instructors as well as periodic meetings on special topics.
- A new course in Cognitive Development was introduced, and the Lifespan Development course was substantially modified.
- A new summer (2011) course in Cognitive Disabilities was introduced as the first fully online offering in the Psychology Department.