

Psychology Departmental Response to the Report of the External Review Committee
January 18, 2008

The External Review Committee, consisting of Philip S. Dale (UNM), Steven A. Hillyard (UC San Diego), Ruth Maki (Texas Tech), and Gregory A. Miller (U Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), visited the Department of Psychology at the University of New Mexico from April 2 through April 4, 2007. The Department would like to express its appreciation to our review committee for their very thoughtful and helpful comments. Some improvements can be implemented at the Department level, and indeed, these have already begun. Some will require administrative support from the University, and we are eager to begin this dialog.

The Psychology Department faculty has developed this response through (1) a series of meetings of our Policy and Planning Committee, (2) lengthy discussions at two faculty meetings, and (3) comments from the entire faculty on a prior draft of this report. In order to provide an overall context in which to consider the specific issues raised, below we offer two quotes from the report.

On the whole this is a strong psychology faculty, with a very good record of publication and external grant support. The high percentage of non-tenured assistant professors on the tenure track is not ideal, but it is a group that shows great promise. The chair of the Department has been very effective. The graduate students are generally pleased with their training, although we have some questions (discussed below) about critical mass of both faculty and students in some content areas. The undergraduate program faces serious challenges with an extraordinarily and unworkably high number of students for the size of the faculty. (p. 1)

Overall, the Committee finds the Department to be performing remarkably well relative to the resources available to it. Our judgment on the three primary questions posed in our charge letter is that the Department has made very reasonable choices about the balance of resources between upper-level vs. lower-level undergraduate instruction, about the balance of resources between undergraduate and graduate instruction, and about areas in which to specialize in its scholarship. However, in each of these domains, the outcome is not entirely satisfactory, overwhelmingly because the resources available to address them are far from adequate. (p. 11)

Below we briefly restate the major issues or criticisms raised in the report. We also briefly describe our deliberations about these matters. Finally, we detail the actions we have taken in response to the report.. These specific actions are numbered consecutively in bold font.

ISSUE 1. The committee characterized three problems faced by the department as a consequence of our attempts to serve a large number of students with relatively few faculty.

First, the percentage of undergraduate courses taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty has declined from 75% to 50% over the last 10 years. (p. 2)

Second, the number and variety of courses available to undergraduate students is fairly small, regardless of rank of instructor. (p. 2)

Third, many students reported little writing experience in their courses. (p. 2)

These problems are difficult to solve without substantial new resources. The committee recommended that these problems could be approached either by (1) hiring more faculty, or (2) reducing student demand by instituting a minimum GPA from students who wanted to be admitted as majors. The Department, of course, would be in favor of hiring additional faculty. It would take several new hires, however, to impact significantly our extraordinary ratio of majors plus minors per FTE (52 in Psychology, vs. 11 in the rest of Arts & Sciences).

While hiring in any area would help with our overwhelming undergraduate teaching load, our greatest need is in Developmental Psychology, in particular for someone with an evolutionary orientation. We have only a single developmental psychologist on our faculty and child psychology courses are extremely popular. This particular type of hire would also address a glaring weakness in our graduate training. Our hiring plan for 2007-2008 recommended that we pursue an assistant professor hire in this area, but that plan was not approved.

The report also noted that we have no Hispanic faculty members. Given the magnitude of our undergraduate teaching load, a minority hire in Psychology would arguably have a greater impact on undergraduate education than in any other department. Our fervent hope is that UNM will institute a well funded opportunity hire program that will help us address this deficiency.

1. For AY 2008-2009 we will again request that Psychology hire an assistant professor in the area of developmental psychology, preferably with expertise in evolutionary psychology. We will also request an “open” hire in any area of experimental psychology, as such a broad search will maximize our chances of getting a sufficient number of minority applicants.

The report also noted that we might offer a better educational experience if we reduced the total number of majors by instituting a GPA requirement. We had several vigorous discussions about this issue at faculty meetings. At present, we decided not to take this step for two reasons. First, we were concerned about a disproportionate impact on minority students. Second, we were concerned that limiting majors might adversely impact graduation rates and time to degree completion for those students not meeting any new GPA requirement. At this time we have decided to collect data that would help us evaluate these concerns.

2. We will require that all faculty utilize WebCT for class grades, beginning in the Fall 2008 semester. This will allow us to better track students over time and systematically evaluate the impact of minority status and college entry ACT scores on our students’ educational experience. After analysis of these data, we will revisit the question of requiring majors to have a specified GPA.

We have long been concerned about the manner in which our large class sizes impacts our ability to provide students opportunities for writing and public speaking. In order to increase writing assignments we will need to increase the number of graduate TAs assigned to courses. The College of Arts and Sciences has assisted us in increasing TA support for enhancing 200-level courses with TA-led discussion groups. So, one way to increase our numbers of TAs would be for the College, again, to help us support additional TA lines for grading undergraduate writing, especially in upper-division courses. In addition, if we could hire a 105 Coordinator at a staff-level appointment to help manage our three sections of Psych 105, which currently enrolls 1,200 to 1,400 students per semester, we could reassign Psych 105 TAs to assist with grading. For

example, we are discussing the merits of adding a laboratory requirement to Psych 302 Research Methods for our B.S. candidates. The TA would attend lectures taught by a faculty member and would teach the lab component, which would emphasize organizing and writing in the style required by the American Psychological Association.

3. We have requested of the College a new staff position to serve as coordinator for our large Introductory Psychology classes. This will free up four TA positions that will be transferred to our Psych 302 Research Methods class, allowing our majors extensive supervised experience in writing scientific papers using APA style.

At lower levels, including Psych 105, we are considering offering small sections (25 students) of the course to serve different interests or abilities (e.g., an honors section). Currently, in cooperation with the University's Freshmen Interest Group Program, we offer three smaller sections of Psych 105, taught by college advisors, which focus on special interest topics (e.g., "Hope"). The FIG sections meet for one hour, twice a week; students also attend the large lecture course. We might offer our own comparable sections, but taught by instructors from the Psychology Department. Another alternative would be offering courses jointly with the English Department through the university's Freshmen Learning Communities Program; one course is currently being offered in this manner. Students gain content from the Psych course while receiving writing experience from the English course.

ISSUE 2: The committee reported that student advisement from the university was insufficient, and that while advisement at the departmental level was good, many students would benefit if there were more ways of learning about current course offerings, courses needed for degrees, and post baccalaureate opportunities.

A critical problem seems to be lack of communication among various levels of advisors at UNM, as well as communication with students. Many students complained of advisors claiming not to know the relevant rules and shuffling the student across campus to another advisor. (p. 3)

The Psychology Department has already taken several steps to improve our advisement of undergraduates:

4. Our Department advisors will visit every 200-level class every semester. They will make a brief presentation on career opportunities for Psychology majors, the nature of requirements for a Psychology degree, and how students may get additional information (e.g., visiting advisors in the Department, use of the Department website). In the fall 2007 semester, this effort appeared to have a substantial impact, as we saw a notable increase in the number of students dropping in for advice.

5. We have added a great deal of information aimed at undergraduates to our website. This includes a new "frequently asked questions" section.

6. To facilitate student planning, we will soon post on the Department website a list of all courses to be offered over the next three upcoming semesters. This will be updated every semester.

ISSUE 3. Significant issues were noted regarding the adequacy of facilities. These issues have also been raised in prior external reviews, as well in accreditation reports from the American Psychological Association.

Logan Hall was built for a smaller faculty conducting research quite different from the mainstream of the field today. There has been little remodeling of the building over the years, and parts of it look dingy. This is exacerbated by poor lighting, particularly in the basement. The amount of space available for laboratories and offices is becoming an increasing problem, which will become more severe with new and potential new hires. Although the space in Logan Hall is less than adequate, the space allocated to the Psychology Clinic is much worse. (p. 4)

We have made no progress on rectifying the limitations of Logan Hall. Indeed, our request for remodeling of Logan Hall, in conjunction with a new Community Behavioral Health Addition (incorporating the Psychology Department Clinic, Agora, and CASAA) has fallen off the list of UNM building plans. However, we have made great strides in improving the situation for the Psychology Department Clinic.

8. Agora, which has shared the same building with the Psychology Clinic for the past several years, will move to a new facility in March of 2008. This will allow the Clinic to take over Agora's old space, allowing for additional room for training. Specifically, we will have a large room available for clinical seminars, writing up progress notes, discussing cases, etc. Another fairly large room will be available as a faculty/staff office or for conducting group psychotherapy. We will also remodel a portion of the existing facility to add one-way mirrors to two therapy rooms.

ISSUE 4. Several issues were raised regarding graduate training. One concern was that graduate students did not feel that working as a TA for our large Introductory classes was a valuable educational experience. Aside from learning current procedures for handling tests and grades for large classes, they are probably right. However, this is a critical component of our undergraduate curriculum and the job simply needs to be done.

If our request for a new staff member to help with clerical duties in Introductory is approved (#3 above), this would solve the problem by greatly reducing TA needs for this class, while simultaneously freeing up TA lines for upper division classes that allow more writing experiences.

ISSUE 5. The review team raised a concern that our graduate students did not feel optimally trained for teaching their own courses.

There is no mandate for training in the teaching of psychology prior to serving as a TA. At present, teaching assistants optionally take a non-departmental training course for teaching assistants. Many graduate students who teach do not take this course. Adding a required course or other systematic training experience before students teach could be useful both for the graduate students' development and for improving the undergraduate curriculum. (p. 6)

Our faculty believe a new policy on graduate student teaching, adopted just a few months before the site visit, will significantly help our graduate students as they approach teaching their first course. At the time of the site visit, this policy had not been in effect long enough for us to judge its impact. This is our new policy:

9. Mentoring and supervision of graduate student teaching (approved December, 2006). In order to facilitate the growth and development of our graduate student's teaching skills, and also maintain quality control over our undergraduate courses, the Psychology faculty agreed that:

1. The associate chair for graduate studies will assign a faculty mentor to each graduate student instructor.
2. The student and faculty member will meet before the course begins and the faculty member will review the syllabus, discuss the nature of grading and examinations, and related matters.
3. The graduate student instructor must attend an orientation meeting under the direction of the associate chair for undergraduate studies before the beginning of the year. This will cover both the nuts and bolts of grading and computer record keeping, as well as issues related to teaching and presentation style.
4. The faculty mentor will visit the class at the beginning of the semester and at least once more, with the primary goal being feedback to the graduate student teacher. The faculty mentor will also provide a brief written review to be submitted to the associate chair for undergraduate studies.
5. Some class sessions of the Research Seminar required of all first year students will be devoted to teaching issues.

Two other options remain under consideration. We could establish a specific course, The Teaching of Psychology, and require it of all students. We could also require students to take a brief course (TARCC) offered by UNM for TAs. At this point we have decided not to implement these options, for several reasons. First, student feedback on TARCC has been mixed at best. Second, adding another required course could increase the number of years to graduation for our graduate students, and this is already a problem. Third, finding an instructor to teach this course would most likely entail reducing the number of undergraduate courses taught by tenure-track faculty, another current sore point. Thus, for now we will closely monitor the impact of our new policy and take other steps as indicated.

ISSUE 6. Our graduate students indicated to the review team that they would benefit from additional, more formal training in several professional issues. Rather than introducing a new course to cover these matters, we decided to initiate a new, informal series of workshops. Each year the department will work with graduate students to determine the most needed topics.

A second set of concerns was focused on area-general issues of professional development for graduate students. There is no required component of the program that deals with such issues as

conference and job presentations, the journal publication process, ethical issues and relations with Institutional Review Boards, and the like. (p. 6)

10. In the spring 2008 semester, the Department will sponsor three different workshops. Professors Barbara McCrady and Kent Kiehl will lead a workshop on obtaining grants. Professors Tim Goldsmith and Kristina Ciesielski will lead one on IRB/HRCC issues. Professors Steve Verney and Kamilla Venner will lead a workshop on cross-cultural and diversity issues.

ISSUE 7. Graduate students in our Cognition/Brain/Behavior program reported to the external review committee that some of their courses were too loosely structured.

The graduate students expressed the view that many of the elective Psychology courses in the CBB program were loosely structured seminars rather than well-organized, intensive learning experiences. (p. 8)

Many of these courses are offered for both undergraduate credit as 450-level courses and for graduate credit at 650-levels. In analyzing this matter further, the major problem appeared to be in distinguishing with greater clarity the requirements for different types of students in these combined classes.

11. To tackle this problem, the faculty recently adopted the following specific policy:

Department-wide policy on syllabi/course structure for 450/650 courses (adopted November 2007).

1. For 450/650 courses the classroom experience should be graduate level.
2. Undergraduate admission will require instructor permission. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that the number and quality of undergraduates entering the course are such as to permit the classes to be conducted at a graduate level of sophistication.
3. Syllabi must include full references for reading assignments and note different reading requirements for undergraduates and graduate students.
4. At least one component of grading for both undergraduate and graduate students must be a mastery-type assessment, either a test or writing assignment. The different grading procedures for undergraduate and graduate students must be specified in detail in the syllabus.
5. At least one lengthy written assignment must be required of both undergraduate and graduate students. Different requirements and grading criteria must be specified in detail. Expectation differences may include only criteria for grades or such factors as length, extent of literature coverage, demonstration of adequate analysis of issues in paper topic, and adequacy of communication.

6. Each time a given course is taught the syllabus must be reviewed by the appropriate area head to ensure that these requirements are met.

ISSUE 8. With respect to graduate study concentrations, the *Report* (a) questioned our strengths in developmental and quantitative, (b) suggested substantive connections were lacking between cognitive and imaging faculty in CBB, and (c) identified evolution and development as lacking an integrative theme.

It is problematic that two areas in department (quantitative and developmental) are now largely single-faculty areas. Similarly, effective doctoral training gains immensely from having a cohort of students who provide both scholarly and social support. Although in several contexts the coverage of developmental material is portrayed as part of a larger evolutionary-developmental program, in at least one printed document from the department the developmental program is advertised as a distinct area. This appears inappropriate.

These are important and complex issues, and in some ways, we disagree with the review. We do not have a separate Developmental training program, only a combined Evolutionary and Developmental program. Hence, we do not aim to have a special strength in developmental. However, the criticism regarding integration of the evolutionary and developmental components of this training program is well founded. As noted above (see response #1), we have long sought to hire someone to bridge these components, knitting them together in a novel and exciting training program.

Regarding the substantive connections between cognitive and imaging faculty, we believe that in this particular matter the review committee reached the wrong conclusion. While we can always improve, several faculty that conduct imaging studies are interested in fundamental cognitive issues. Currently, only one out of the thirteen faculty in the CBB area do not use imaging or other neuroscience methods such as eye movement monitoring or skin conductance response in their research. Some of our CBB faculty that perform imaging studies are focused on research in other areas of psychology, such as Clinical, that are not directly related to Cognitive psychology. We feel that such diversity makes the CBB area and the Department stronger, not weaker, and provides our students with a broader range of perspectives. This is the only criticism in the external review that we contest.

We have had many difficult discussions about graduate training in Quantitative. The central issues are our limited faculty in the area and the associated difficulty in attracting good graduate students.

12. While the Department highly values training in this area, and will continue to offer at least as many courses as in the past, we will no longer recruit and train graduate students whose wish to major in Quantitative Psychology.

ISSUE 9. The external review committee addressed several issues related to diversity.

Our impression is that senior faculty are supportive in principle but, in general, do not yet fully “get it” about a variety of aspects of diversity. One of the very few ethnic minority faculty members, an assistant professor, has courageously started a department-level committee that is receiving some departmental financial support but to date, according to graduate students, little buy-in by senior faculty department-wide. We would like to clarify that we do not see the Department as having larger diversity problems than is common in peer settings (p. 10)

We have already discussed the need for more minority faculty. Recruiting minority graduate students has always been a top priority for the Department, but a major difficulty has been the lack of competitive TA and RA stipends. This problem has been identified by the College of Arts and Sciences as one of the most critical problems facing graduate education at UNM. We hope the Dean will be successful in raising these stipends. Last year the College was able to provide supplemental funds for recruitment of minority graduate students. We hope this program will continue.

In regards to the “climate” in the department, we have approached this issue in several ways. We have had extensive discussions at recent faculty meetings in hopes of bringing out all the issues and opinions.

13. Senior faculty have agreed to become more active in our departmental efforts to foster diversity training and minority recruitment.

14. Through the efforts of Steven Verney and Kamilla Venner, we have applied to the American Psychological Association for a training grant in the area of “faculty development”. This will bring in guest speakers and establish workshops for our faculty.

Conclusion Through our comprehensive self-study and the thoughtful, professional external review, the Department of Psychology has gained much insight into our strengths, weaknesses, and options. Many issues were identified and some could be tackled at the Department level. The fourteen specific steps outlined above represent concrete, good faith efforts to address many of our weaknesses. We look forward to working with the UNM administration in addressing those requiring additional resources.