External Review Report

Academic Unit:	Psychology Program
College:	School of Social Sciences
University:	Sonoma State University
Degree Programs:	B.A. in Psychology
External Reviewer:	Sharon Furtak, Department of Psychology, Sacramento State
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I. Context:

The Psychology program self-study included an overview of the curriculum, assessments, and resources for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degree offered within the School of Social Science at Sonoma State University. The Psychology self-study was self-reflective, offering insight and constructive criticism of the degree structure. This self-study was timely, offering data and evaluation across a large span of time, from AY 2022-2023 to AY 2014-2015 (the year of their previous self-study), and included historical data from 2003-2004 in some cases. The self-study was complete, including evaluations of aspects of the program and analyzing the strengths and weakness of the program. The self-study document consisted of 33 pages divided into eight elements: Element One: Summary Data; Element Two: Program Context and Curriculum; Element Three: Assessment; Element Four: Faculty; Element Five: Program Resources; Element Six: Student Success; Element Seven: Reflection and Action Plan; and Element Eight: Conclusion. The self-study document was accompanied by 9 appendices.

As the External Reviewer, I brought three unique characteristics to the review process. First, as a faculty member of Sacramento State, I have a unique understanding of the CSU system as it relates to resource availability and policy. Second, as the Interim Chair of Psychology at Sacramento State, I have department-based knowledge pertaining to curriculum and students' career trajectories. Third, as a previous member of the Academic Program Review Committee, a subcommittee of the Sacramento State Faculty Senate Curriculum Policies Committee, I have expertise in the Academic Review process.

As part of the External Review process, there was a full day on-campus visit and two additional meetings that occurred off-campus via Zoom the subsequent day. The agenda included meetings with the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Dean of the School of Social Science, all eight full-time faculty in Psychology, students in the Psychology major, staff (administrative and advising) and a lecturer of the Psychology program. The External Review is based on information gleaned both from the self-study report and the interactions with constituents. The External Review report will synthesize this information based on the four main elements stated in the External Reviewer Guidelines for Program Review document for Sonoma State University. These consist of (1) curriculum, (2) assessment, (3) staffing & resources, and (4) students. Then, several recommendations are presented for consideration.

Element One: Curriculum | Currency & Relevance and Integration of Learning Outcomes

The Department of Psychology at Sonoma State University offers one degree program, a Bachelor of Art in Psychology, and also supports GE at the University by offering two GE courses. On Sonoma State's Psychology home page, a department mission is not stated. However, the goal is listed as "to empower students with the knowledge that will enable them to be effective agents of change in the world." The curricular requirements of the Psychology degree were last updated in 2014 and include completion of four lower division courses and roughly eight upper division courses for a total of 44 units. Of the lower division requirements, three of the four courses can be transferred in from community college and include introductory courses in psychology, statistics, and research methods. The fourth lower division requirement, Psychology of Self-Discovery, cannot be transferred in and reflects the historical commitment of the Department to the humanistic

perspective. Upper division requirements of the Psychology major include taking one course in four of five breath areas and an additional four elective courses (13-14 units) in psychology. Of note, diversity-related issues within Psychology are a priority for the Department with three recent hires focused on expertise in this area. However, this expertise has not been formally integrated into the curriculum even though two of the seven Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) focus specifically on diversity-related learning. There are three courses offered with a diversity focus in the Social/Personality breadth area; however, a student does not need to choose one of these diversity courses to successfully complete their degree in Psychology.

The current curricular structure offers flexibility for Psychology majors to concentrate on a subdiscipline within Psychology while still maintaining breath across prominent subdisciplines. It is worth considering whether this amount of flexibility in the curriculum may be a disadvantage in advising, scheduling, enrollment management or assessment. Fiscal demands on scheduling costs will become increasing challenging in the future and likely will require cancellation of low enrolled course sections, being able to offer larger student sections of a core course in the curriculum may support a more fiscally economical program and support a smaller number of specialized courses offerings. As noted in Section 2.2.1 of the self-study report, the department has already "adapted to decreased resources by discontinuing courses, removing course sequencing, and reducing major requirements." Redesigning the curriculum to incorporate a few core upper division courses that highlight Department priorities in diversity coursework, incorporate the WEC (writing enhanced courses) requirement of the University, and align with student needs and the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) would likely be beneficial to the Department.

The Psychology major has seven PLOs that were adopted in 2018. The self-study report aligns these PLOs with recommended Learning Goals and Outcomes for undergraduate psychology curriculum from the American Psychological Association (APA), a national standard in Psychology. Broadly, these PLOs focus within the discipline of psychology on content knowledge, scientific reasoning, interpretation and design of research, behavioral change, identifying diversity, recognizing biases, and insight of inner experiences. Aligning the seven PLOs with the WASC core competencies, in addition to APA, would provide alignment with national standards for undergraduate learning expectations, and is encouraged. Currently, it is not clear that all Psychology majors take the coursework necessary to reach all seven PLOs. Some courses seem not to support any of the seven PLOs (i.e., Psychology of Yoga) and should be considered whether they serve a purpose in the curriculum. Given this misaligned of courses with the PLOs, it will be imperative to update the current PLO document to build a curriculum that supports all Psychology majors accomplishing the seven PLOs.

The self-study report and individual conversations with both faculty members and Psychology majors have highlighted an immediate need to discuss the future vision of the department as it relates to the curriculum of the Psychology major and the mission of the Department. Based on these conversations, the main concern is whether the Holistic breath area should be evaluated for relevancy and alignment with current topics in Psychology. Individual conversations with constituents suggested that this is a sensitive topic with strong opinions. The success of this challenging discussion will significantly depend on having an independent voice that has an extensive understanding of Psychology while maintaining neutrality across groups of faculty. One suggestion would be to prioritize the hire of an external Psychology Chair who could led the conversation and guide the Department toward a long-term direction. Ultimately, it is inevitably necessary and timely to discuss the humanistic focus of the department and whether it continues to serve students in marketable skills and preparation for post-graduate success in the workforce or graduate programs.

Regardless of the future direction of the Department, there will need to be a prioritization of students' needs. As the Senior Exit Survey suggests counseling/clinical psychology is the largest interest of Psychology majors. At least half of those who responded to the survey plan to pursue a counseling/clinical career pathway, with an additional one quarter focused on graduate programs outside counseling. Collectively, that means that approximately 75% of Psychology majors who participated in the survey anticipate enrolling in a graduate program that is either geared toward counseling licensure or research focused graduate work in Psychology. The survey also suggests that roughly 40% of Psychology alumni enrolled in graduate programs post-graduation between 2016-2018, which is higher than the University average. This would suggest the current student need

should focus on preparation of coursework necessary for graduate programs in counseling and other psychology subdisciplines, such as an upper division statistics and methods course. Currently, as stated in the self-study report, the Psychology Department already regularly offers three courses (Personality, Child Development and Psychopathology) required by the Master of Arts in Counseling program at Sonoma State University, of which Psychology majors are a largely contributor to applications.

Element Two: Assessment | Effectiveness of Assessment for Program Improvement

The self-study included three strategies for assessment, including, a Senior Exit Survey and course-specific assessments. In addition, review of course syllabi verified that all courses listed either PLOs or course learning outcomes (CLOs). It was not clear how these assessment strategies align to effective assessment of the seven PLOs. One consideration would be to create an assessment plan that aligns assessment strategies to specific courses within the curriculum and maps it onto each PLO. I would encourage the Department to assure that the structure of their curriculum creates a path for every student to reach competency in all seven PLOs.

Results from the Senior Exit Survey indicate that the top reasons for pursing a Psychology degree at Sonoma State University are job (29%) or graduate school (17%) preparation. Overall, high ratings were reported in the clarity of Psychology degree, relevance of course content, quality of instruction, development of mindfulness and active listening techniques. The highest perceived skills acquired from the Psychology major requirements were the use of spreadsheet programs, data analysis program, and writing cover letters and resumes. The Senior Exit Survey included several content knowledge questions within the Psychology discipline (PLO1: Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology and apply to relevant contexts). Respondents correctly answered 63% of the content questions on Psychology from 2016 to 2023. The question with the highest correct rating pertained to research methods; whereas lowest correct ratings were in neuroscience (neurotransmitters) and late life intellectual changes. These findings should be incorporated into modifications within courses or across the major curriculum. Assessment of PLO 1 suggested disparities exist in first-generation and transfer student populations. These disparities suggest that additional support within the curriculum should focus on these student groups. For example, could studying strategies or other academic skills being incorporated into the first courses transfer students take within the Psychology major? In 2018, the Senior Exit Survey added questions related to identifying diversity. Results showed high levels of recognition of group-based advantages and disadvantages, showing that Psychology majors demonstrate successful obtainment of PLO5. Note, only one quarter of students complete the survey, which may skew results.

The course-specific assessments focused on three courses: *Psychology of Self-Discovery, Psychology of Diversity,* and *Psychology of Gender.* The Psychology of Self-Discovery course is a lower division core course required of all Psychology majors that must be taken at Sonoma State University. The assessment analyzed reflection papers from 22 students in one section of the course in order to evaluate PLO 7 (Demonstrate insight into inner experiences using psychological concepts and practices). Results found that students were able to reflect on how their own media usage impact sleep, connection with friends, focus on tasks, and awareness of the present moment. These results suggest development of PLO 7. The Psychology of Diversity course assessment focused on evaluating PLOs 5 & 6, which relate to identifying diversity and recognizing biases. Of the students who took the course compared to those who did not (waitlist only), students in the course reported a stronger sense of belonging, greater sense of meaning in life, and more knowledge and comfort regarding diversity of all types. Results align with demonstration of PLOs 5 & 6. The Psychology of Gender course also assessed PLO 6 (recognizing biases) by including a question on the final exam relating to an instance of explicit and subtle bias. Of the 35 students, 23 students (66%) met the learning outcome of being able to distinguish between implicit stereotype activation and explicit endorsement of racial stereotypes. Again, displaying that most students in this course demonstrated competency in PLO 6.

Element Three: Staffing and Resources | Sufficiency of Resources to Support Quality of Learning

There are currently eight tenure/tenured-track faculty in Psychology, who represent a variety of subdisciplines in Psychology with five social/personality, two clinical/counseling, one developmental, and zero in cognitive/physiology (although one new hire in cognitive/physiology will begin in Fall 2024). From Fall 2003 to Fall 2022, the number of Psychology majors increased by 146%, while the number of tenured/tenure-track faculty decreased by 19%. The lack of hires for several years created an imbalance of seniority among the faculty with almost twice the number of senior faculty compared to junior faculty. Given this division, it will be important to have clarity around the expectations during Retention, Tenure and Promotion (RTP). I would encourage a review of, and possible update to, the current Department RTP policy that includes the active participation of junior faculty in the discussion. Several additional actions could support community building among faculty. Namely, make Department meeting agenda available at least 48 hours beforehand to increase participation of junior faculty in the meeting and create a formal mentoring process to support retention of diverse faculty. The recent hires in the Department are strong and actions that support their retention should be encouraged. The Department is currently Chaired by a faculty within the Sociology Department, Dr. Milligan. Dr. Milligan has implemented a significant overhaul of procedure, process and organization in the Department that has greatly benefited the Department.

The 19% decrease in the number of faculty in relation to the 146% increase of Psychology majors has had a significant impact on the ability of faculty to support Psychology majors in post-graduation success. For example, there are fewer opportunities available for students to gain experiential hands-on skills that are essential to success post-graduation, including but not limited to research experience, faculty advisors for student clubs, and fieldwork/internships in Psychology. For example, there is no tenured/tenure-track faculty available to coordinate internships and a course on careers in Psychology is being instructed by a faculty in Social Work, which students voiced was misaligned with the discipline of Psychology. These experiential opportunities facilitate letters of recommendation necessary for employment and graduate programs. Higher faculty to student ratios has had unintended consequences in the ability of tenured/tenure-track faculty to support student mentorship through the graduate program application process and career advancement. These are key factors in student success post-graduation and should be carefully evaluated by administration when considering the priority of hiring lines.

While opportunities are limited, I was impressed with what opportunities the tenured/tenure-track faculty do provide for students. For example, one faculty maintains a lab with as high as 18 students in order to provide hands on experiences in psychological research to as many students as possible. Another faculty embeds skill-building into their course on Child Development. It will be important to think creatively about how curricular design could support and recognize this extra workload since research is not compensated. Of note, the new building that houses the Psychology Department created research spaces that can accommodate observations and other types of basic psychological research. Start-up funds are available for new hires for equipment. These have helped in recruiting and hiring of highly competitive faculty. Although funding for research (i.e., computers, giftcards, etc…) will be essential to the continuation of successful research programs and student opportunities in psychological research.

As enrollment trends nationally, and at Sonoma State University, are on the decline, it will be important for the Psychology Department to consider coming off impaction. While the general sense expressed by Psychology faculty was one of minimal impact from fiscal issues, this will likely not continue to be the case moving forward. As the CSU enrollment dashboard indicates, Sonoma State University has seen an overall decline in enrollments from 9,120 in 2013 to 5,865 in 2023, a decline of 64%. Being able to access impaction data will be critical for this conversation around impaction. For example, (1) How many more majors would result if they lowered an eligibility criteria to a 2.5 GPA level?; (2) How many majors would they have if they weren't on impaction?, or (3) What is the capacity of the program if additional academic advising support were present? Curricular changes, such as pre-major, should be consider as an option to facilitate control or prediction of the number of Psychology majors instead of impaction. Regardless of whether the Department stays on impaction, it is essential for the department to resolve the issue around advising workload independent of impaction and provide quantitative data of faculty workload. Throughout the self-study report and meetings with constituents there was significant emphasis on workload concerns and burnout around the academic advising of students.

The addition of a full-time advising staff (Cem Burnham) has significantly helped to alleviate workload issues around advising. Maintaining this level of advising support will be critical to faculty-administration coordination around enrollment in the Psychology major. This includes not moving first and second year advising onto the responsibility of this position. It is important to highlight that the advisor does significantly more than just advise. For exmaple, Mr. Burnham also assists students in registration, refers students to campus resources, reviews requirements for graduating students, review information related to graduation, supports transfer credit issues, assists in form submission, support students on academic probation, follows up with students receiving incompletes, and helps with student recruitment. It is clear from individual meetings that the combination of hiring advising support combined with the new organization of advising initiated by Dr. Milligan, Psychology Chair, has helped to decrease workload and equally spread advising among faculty. Importantly, the Senior Exit Survey suggested students are satisfied with their advising. Moreover, in my meeting with students, they expressed a collective agreement that one of the strongest aspects of the Psychology program was the access and availability they had to their faculty.

There are several ways to consider as a goal to continue to moderate workload around advising. For example, the creation of a course that reviews the curriculum and career pathways early on that is required of all Psychology majors may decrease the need for students to seek out faculty advising. Holding semesterly group advising events just prior to registration for the following semester may have a similar effect. It is also encouraged to work with the Dean to explore whether it would be possible to establish a School of Social Sciences level advising center that would be staff by more than one advisor and would be shared among departments in the school. This would be advantageous because it would allow more than one staff to support advising, making it less effected by possible staff turnover, and helps to avoid staff burnout. It also can help redirect students who don't get into the Psychology major find an alternative pathway to career success.

Element Four: Students (Student Success, Characteristics and Ability of Program to Serve Students)

As of Fall 2023, the Psychology Department consisted of 8 tenured/tenure-track faculty, 16 lecturers, a shared administrative staff and a full-time advisor. In Fall 2023, there were 623 Psychology majors. Enrollment data suggested consistent interest in the Psychology major with a range between 540 to 665 majors since the last self-study in 2014. This is 100-200 more Psychology majors than in Fall 2003. While the number of majors has increased over the last two decades, the number of tenured/tenure-track faculty has not, creating an increase in the faculty to student ratio from 34 to 79.

Roughly three-quarters of students in the program identify as female with a 40% representation of Latinx and 45% White student groups in the degree program. In addition, 28% of Psychology majors are first-generation. The self-study reported that Pell data was not available for analysis. The majority of Psychology majors maintained part-time employment while enrolled full-time. DFW rates for Psychology courses were less than 9% with the exception of Introduction to Psychology, which also tends to have high DFW rates nationally. There are some disparities between student populations in select courses but additional assessments are warranted to understand the cause and what strategies could be most effective at combating the inequities. Retention and graduation rates were higher than those observed in the University across first year students, and the rate increased between 2017 and 2019. The average GPA of 3.31 for Psychology major students were higher than College and University levels and reflected a slightly higher unit load per semester. However, a year-by-year 2-year, 4-year and 6-year review of graduation rates was not presented. Student success has been enhanced by research experience, internships, student clubs (Psi Chi Honors Society and NAMI), and service-learning coursework. However, these opportunities are very limited due to the low faculty to student ratio. Roughly just 80 out of 600 student per semester are able to engage in these opportunities.

II. Recommendations: Based on the self-study suggests that the Department of Psychology consider the following consistent findings, best policies, procedures, goals and initiatives, and best practices when drafting the action plan:

1) Create a department mission statement that can inform updates to the curricular structure of the Psychology major and provide vision for the future of the Department.

2) Advocate for a new hiring in the department that will step into the Chair position and led discussions on the future direction of the department.

3) Incorporate the priority of diversity-related learning into a curricular requirement for all Psychology majors.

4) Consider whether the current curricular structure of the Psychology major would benefit from less flexibility and a few core courses in the upper division requirements.

5) In collaboration with the Academic Program Review division of Academic Affairs, review and update the document that aligns the seven PLOs with courses offered in the Psychology major curriculum to create a cohesive plan that informs curricular changes to assure that every major successfully accomplish all seven PLOs.

6) In collaboration with the Academic Program Review division of Academic Affairs, create an assessment plan that aligns assessment strategies to specific courses within the curriculum and maps it onto the seven PLOs.

7) Advocate for a new hiring in the department with a specialization in counseling/clinical Psychology, given the emphasis of student interest, that can increase internship or research opportunities for students.

8) Review current criteria for impaction and discuss strategies to come off impaction.

9) Consider working with the Dean to establish a School of Social Science level shared advising and student success center that would have several advisors and support all departments in the college in advising and guide students who didn't get into the Psychology major into alternative parallel pathways that still align with the student's career goals.