**Sonoma State University Psychology Department Bachelors of Arts**

**Program Review 2014-2024[[1]](#footnote-1)**

April 2024

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**Sonoma State University Psychology Department Bachelors of Arts**

**Program Review 2014-2024**

April 2024

1. **Summary Data**

Program Name: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

Department: Psychology

School: Social Sciences

Degree Offered: Psychology B.A.

Last Program Review:

2014 (not reviewed beyond interim School of Social Sciences Dean)

Basic Information for Academic Year,  Fall 2023

Number of majors:  623

Annualized enrollment (FTES):  408.30

Faculty/Student Advising Ratio:  1/79

Full-Time/Part-time Faculty Ratio: 1/2 (8/16)

Faculty/Student Average Class Size Ratio: 1/31.2

Number of permanent tenured/tenure-track faculty: 8

Number of lecturers: 16

Number of upper division major courses: 40

Number of lower division major courses: 3

Number of GE courses: 2 (Psy 250, *Introduction to Psychology*, Lower Division Area D; Psy 325, *Social Psychology*, Upper Division Area D)

Number of GE Sections: Typically 4 sections each term

88% of majors enrolled in 12 or more units

Department Chair 2014-Spring 2023: Elisa Velasquez

Department Chair Fall 2023-present: Melinda Milligan (Professor in Sociology)

1. **Program Context and Curriculum**

**2.1 Curriculum Overview**

The Psychology department offers the Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. Since the last program review, the department adopted a new curriculum designed to minimize graduation hurdles in the context of extremely limited resources (eight full time faculty with over 600 students in the major, please see **Appendix 1** for student/faculty ratios over time). The department also deepened its diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) expertise by 1) hiring three assistant professors with relevant scholarship and teaching expertise in DEI, 2) prioritizing courses focused on diversity and 3) adopting a department diversity statement (<https://psychology.sonoma.edu/about-psychology>).

The department offers the social/personality, developmental, and clinical courses included in most psychology departments’ programs as well as courses focused on health and wellness, mindfulness, ecopsychology, optimal performance, and multi-cultural competence. Psychology is the largest single major on a campus of 5,867 students, with an estimated 11.6% of the university’s majors and 9.8% of the university degrees awarded in Spring 2023.

**2.1.1. Educational philosophy and pedagogy.** The department emphasizes engaged and active learning. It is our hope that our students not only become trained in the discipline of psychology, but become informed, educated, proactive and effective citizens in a multiculturally diverse world, in the true spirit of a liberal arts education.

The department responds to students’ needs and interests by offering courses that integrate student career and interest areas. We are primarily a face to face campus and offer in person courses that are designed around active and experiential learning with about 25% of courses offered online, and a small number of service learning courses. The department also schedules additional course sections based on student demand (e.g., *Myth, Dream and Symbol, Introduction to Counseling, Psychopathology*).  In 2014, the department adopted a curriculum designed to eliminate graduation roadblocks (by enabling students to take upper-division courses before completing lower department requirements, and limiting required coursework to four lower division courses, three of which could be completed at community colleges). Finally, department faculty and staff work hard to give as many students as possible the personal attention and support that they deserve. Four of the eight assigned time units given to the Department Chair are focused on undergraduate student advising and support.

As shown in Table 1, the department’s 44 unit major requires that students take four lower-division foundational courses; choose four upper-division courses from five different Breadth areas; and select 13-14 additional units from Breadth or Elective course categories. A “roadmap” for incoming psychology majors is included in **Appendix 2**.

**Table 1**

*Psychology Major Requirements*

Lower Division Courses

        Psy 250, *Introduction to Psychology* (or equivalent)  3 units

        Math 165, *Statistics* (GE Area B4) (or equivalent) 3-4 units

        Psy 270, *Psychology of Self-Discovery* 4 units

        Psy 280, *Psychological Research Methods* (or equivalent) 3-4 units

Upper Division Courses

        Complete one course from 4 out of 5 Breadth Areas 15-16 units

        Additional courses drawn from Breadth Areas or “Elective Courses” 13-15 units

Total 44 units

**2.1.2. Lower-Division Foundational Courses.** The foundational courses provide all majors with common knowledge, skills, and language for understanding the foundations and assumptions of the upper division courses. The department requires *Psy 250,* *Introduction to Psychology*, and *Math 165,* *Statistics*, as introductory lower division courses in the major. *Psy 250, Introduction to Psychology* introduces the student to the broad range of theory and research in psychology. *Math 165,* *Statistics,* introduces the student to statistical measurement methods and analyses for studying and interpreting research results (*Math 165* also meets the lower division GE quantitative reasoning requirement).

*Psy 280,* *Psychological Research Methods*, develops knowledge and skills in psychological research methods, data collection and data interpretation. The American Psychological Association lists methodological skills as a core learning outcome for undergraduate psychology majors. Students can complete this course at any community college or university.

*Psy 270,* *Psychology of Self-Discovery*, is the only course that all psychology majors must take at Sonoma State University (SSU, as opposed to a community college or other university). This course develops knowledge and skills in self-awareness, interpersonal awareness, and self-reflection. Although grounded in the department’s historical humanistic perspective, the course draws from multiple sub-areas of psychology with the goal of introducing students to psychological theory, research and practice relevant to developing self-knowledge as well as tools designed to improve students’ well-being. It presents basic skills and practices in self-reflection, mindfulness, dreamwork, and various other contemplative practices.

**2.1.3. Breadth areas**.The department’s curriculum includes five Breadth areas. Four of these breadth areas (described below) are sub-disciplines within psychology.

* Clinical / Counseling courses develop knowledge and skills in understanding and helping others as well as health-promoting behaviors.
* Developmental courses investigate changes in people over the life span, and explore how this knowledge can be used in applied settings such as parenting, education, and community life.
* Social / Personality courses focus on how individual differences among people and the social context in which they live shape their emotions, thoughts and behavior.
* Cognitive / Biological courses explore the physiological and biological foundations of human experience, as well as the mental processes involved in learning, memory, perception, language and problem solving.

The fifth breadth area, Holistic, includes courses that reflect the department’s historic emphasis on humanistic psychology, and emphasizes the personal reflection and behavioral change department learning outcomes.

* Holistic courses focus on the whole person by developing knowledge and skills integral to personal health and growth, such as self-reflection, self-awareness, self-control, and creativity.

Majors choose one upper-division course from four out of the five Breadth areas, selecting from a menu of courses offered each semester in each Breadth area. Breadth area course offerings vary by semester, although some courses (such as *Lifespan Psychology* and *Social Psychology)* are foundational courses for the breadth area and are offered every semester. One upper-division psychology course, *Social Psychology*, is also a GE Area D course. Therefore, the course may be double-counted as a major breadth area course (covering the Social / Personality Breadth area) as well as a GE course. All Breadth area courses must be taken for a grade and passed with a minimum grade of C. The department also offers *Psy 490*, *Seminar* courses that can meet different breadth areas, with topics and instructors varying by semester. These small seminars (fewer than 25 students) are intended as opportunities for faculty to teach courses in their area of expertise or interest one or two times before they decide to propose a particular course to be part of the permanent undergraduate curriculum. **Appendix 3** lists department courses for each breadth category.

The Breadth area menu option ensures that students have an adequate selection of courses every semester that satisfies Breadth requirements. No bottlenecks in accessing required classes, or delays in graduation, have been reported as a result of the Breadth area courses.

**2.1.4. Electives.** Students are required to take 13-14 additional units, chosen either from the Breadth areas or the Electives category. The Electives consist of community internships, research internships, credit-no credit classes, and other classes that do not fit specific Breadth areas. All Elective courses must be taken for a grade and passed with a minimum grade of C unless C/NC is the only grading option for the course. A maximum of 8 units of credit-no credit classes may count toward the major. The department hopes that students will choose courses from the elective or breadth categories in their senior year that enables more intensive study, more practical skills development, and more focused work in an area of interest to them.

**2.1.5. Program Learning Outcomes**

Table 2 lists the department’s learning outcomes and how they fit with the American Psychological Association’s recommendations for undergraduate psychology major curriculum (<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/undergraduate-psychology-major>). These outcomes, adopted in Fall 2018, include two specific diversity and research method outcomes (as opposed to one for each of the other areas). Faculty revised these learning outcomes to be more easily assessed in comparison to the previous department learning outcomes.

The department’s program learning outcomes are included in the course catalog and on the department website (<https://psychology.sonoma.edu/about-psychology>). Faculty are expected to meet at least one department learning outcome in a course; they are not expected to meet all seven of the department learning outcomes in a single course. By making these links explicit, students are able to evaluate if their coursework meets the learning outcomes set by the department. They then can more easily assess if their course of study in the major offers a coherent passage through the learning outcomes established by the department.

**Table 2**

*Department Learning Outcomes, APA Learning Goals, and APA Learning Outcomes*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Department Learning Outcome** | **APA Learning Goal (2023)** | **APA Learning Outcomes (2023)** |
| 1. Describe key concepts, principles and overarching themes in psychology and apply to relevant contexts (i.e. ethical, clinical, personal, career, scientific, sociocultural). | Goal 1: Content Knowledge and Applications  Goal 4:  Communication, Psychological Literacy, and Technology Skills | 1.1 Describe key concepts, principles, and theories in psychological science  1.2 Develop a working knowledge of psychology’s major subfields  4.3 Provide evidence of psychological literacy |
| 1. Use scientific reasoning to interpret psychological phenomena. | Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking | 2.1 Exercise scientific reasoning to investigate psychological phenomena |
| 1. Interpret and design basic psychological research | Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking  Goal 3: Values in Psychological Science | 2.2 Interpret, design, and evaluate psychological research  2.3 Incorporate sociocultural factors in scientific research practices  3.1 Employ ethical standards in research, practice, and academic contexts |
| 1. Demonstrate skills that promote behavioral change at the individual, organizational, and community levels. | Goal 1:  Content Knowledge and Applications  Goal 3: Values in Psychological Science  Goal 4: Communication, Psychological Literacy, and Technology Skills  Goal 5:  Personal and Professional Development | 1.4 Apply psychological content to solve practical problems  3.3 Apply psychological principles to strengthen community and improve quality of life  4.1 Interact effectively with others  5.4 Cultivate workforce collaboration skills |
| 1. Identify the Big 8 diversity groups (race/ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion and socio-economic status) and analyze their effects on interpersonal and intergroup dynamics. | Goal 3: Values in Psychological Science | 3.2 Develop and practice interpersonal and intercultural responsiveness |
| 1. Recognize and respond to instances of explicit and subtle bias and discrimination in personal and professional contexts. | Goal 4: Communication, Psychological Literacy, and Technology Skills  Goal: 5  Personal and Professional Development | 4.1 Interact effectively with others  5.3 Display effective judgment in professional interactions |
| 7. Demonstrate insight into inner experiences using psychological concepts and practices. | Goal 3: Values in Psychological Science  Goal 5: Personal and Professional Development | 3.3 Apply psychological principles to strengthen community and improve quality of life  5.1 Exhibit effective self-regulation |

As indicated on the department webpage (<https://psychology.sonoma.edu/about-psychology>), the department strongly recommends that students take courses in psychology and other disciplines to gain competence in diverse areas of culture, race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, and social class. Although all psychology faculty are committed to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in their courses, specific courses focus on diversity issues and the development of students’ multicultural competence. These courses are identified in the course descriptions and the department curriculum plan.

**Appendix 4** presents a curricular map that connects individual courses (outside of the *Psy 490* seminars available for the development of new courses or one time course offerings) with the department’s student learning outcomes. The curricular map shows whether courses introduce, develop or demonstrate each of the learning outcomes. While most courses introduce or develop one or more of the department learning outcomes, faculty identified few courses that demonstrated (the highest level of learning) department learning outcomes. A few courses (mostly identified as upper division diversity courses) offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their familiarity with the Big 8 of diversity (Velasquez et al., 2023)[[2]](#footnote-2), and different types of discrimination. A few courses offer students the opportunity to demonstrate behavioral change skills and a few courses offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning of core psychological concepts. However, the degree of choice created by the current curricular structure does not guarantee that students will enroll in courses that enable the demonstration of department learning outcomes. We return to this problem in the final section of this program review.

**2.2. How The Program Serves The University**

**2.2.1. University Core Values**

The department’s student learning outcomes, curricular and co-curricular opportunities all support the university’s core values of diversity and social justice, sustainability and environmental inquiry, connectivity and community engagement, and adaptability and responsiveness.[[3]](#footnote-3) In support of diversity and social justice, the department includes both a diversity, inclusion and equity statement and two diversity focused learning outcomes. The faculty also used a recent Teagle Grant to create and assess a *Psychology of Diversity* course as a potential new core requirement. Five full time faculty (Callahan, Martinez, Ni, Smith, and Brassington) define their scholarship as related to social justice issues that include political polarization, collective action, social class bias, the development of resilience, and increased inclusion in STEM fields.

In support of sustainability and environmental inquiry, Dr. Mary Gomes regularly teaches a course in *Ecopsychology* and serves as the university-wide Faculty Sustainability Chair. In support of connectivity and community engagement, several faculty teach courses designed to facilitate community engagement, either through service learning opportunities, community based internships or improving general communication and organizational skills. Since 2020, Dr. Missy Garvin has served as the lead faculty fellow (and now as the university-wide faculty director) for the university center for community engagement. In support of adaptability and responsiveness, *Psy 270, The Psychology of Self-Discovery*, a lower-division required course for all psychology majors, is designed to foster the self-reflection skills that increase people’s ability to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. Similarly, the department has adapted to decreased resources by discontinuing courses, removing course sequencing, and reducing major requirements.

**2.2.2.** **General Education**

The department offers one lower division General Education (GE) course, *Psy 250, Introduction to Psychology*, that meets lower division Social Sciences requirements. This course also is recommended for any student who plans to apply to medical school (the material is included as part of the Medical College Admissions Test) and SSU undergraduate nursing students. The department offers one upper division General Education Area D course*, Psy 325, Social Psychology*, that meets the major social and personality breadth requirement. Because of students’ interest in counseling careers and SSU’s graduate program, the department regularly offers *Psy 461, Personality*, *Psy 410, Child Development*, and *Psy* *425, Psychopathology*; courses required by the SSU Counseling graduate program.

To help the university address drops in student enrollment, the department has moved from its traditional 3.0 GPA impact criteria to a more flexible impaction criteria that ensures that the university is able to accept as many qualified students as possible. For example, the last two years, the department has accepted students with high school GPAs of 2.8 or higher. As a result of this change in impaction criteria, the Psychology major has not experienced the declines in enrollment that other departments at SSU and the School of Social Sciences have experienced. Unfortunately, this spring, Admissions did not consult with the department and instead, chose to accept students with GPAs below 3.0 into their second choice major, with the suggestion that it would be easy to transfer to the Psychology major after they arrived. Not only is this transfer not guaranteed, it creates additional workload for the department.

**2.3. How the Program Serves Regional and State Needs**

The need for mental health professionals of all types continues to grow. The Healthforce Center at UCSF estimates that “If current trends continue, California will have 41 percent fewer psychiatrists than needed and 11 percent fewer psychologists, licensed marriage and family therapists, licensed professional clinical counselors and licensed clinical social workers than needed by 2028” (2/12/18, <https://healthforce.ucsf.edu/publications/california-s-current-and-future-behavioral-health-workforce>). These estimates for mental health providers have grown since the COVID-19 pandemic. A bachelor’s degree is a necessary first step for those who plan to serve specific populations or provide specific clinical skills (<https://www.apa.org/education-career>). Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students who are accepted to the SSU Master’s Counseling Programs are SSU psychology majors.

As indicated by the Gray Associates algorithm score of 99 out of 100, the SSU undergraduate psychology program is an outstanding fit to student demand, program competition and institution mission for students within 100 miles of campus. Within this radius, there are 20 local and 40 fully online BA programs available to students. Given the impaction and limits associated with psychology programs at the UCs, other CSUs and private universities, the SSU Psychology department gives local qualified students important access to the bachelor’s degree. Psychology majors, alums and faculty also serve the local community as volunteers and interns for local community organizations, boards, and schools.   
**2.4. How the Program is Distinctive**

The Psychology Department at SSU was founded in 1960 with a predominantly humanistic and existential approach to psychology. This distinctive history is reflected in the required lower division course, *Psy 270,* *Psychology of Self-Discovery*, and the Holistic breadth area that includes courses such as *Myth, Dream & Symbol* and *Psychology of Meditation*. Since the 1970s, theory and research on happiness and well-being has flourished. In particular, the field of positive psychology is a partial outgrowth of humanistic psychology which the department was founded on (Boniwell, 2012)[[4]](#footnote-4). Current courses reflect these changes. Most important, the department’s emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal skill development, active learning, empirically grounded theory, and models of diversity and well-being ensure that SSU psychology majors get access to the type of liberal arts education available at private universities and colleges at a public state university price.

Despite the large number of majors and relatively few tenure-track faculty, the department has a remarkable record of including psychology majors as co-authors of professional and campus-based research presentations, and as partners in community-based interventions and programs. Full time faculty regularly sponsor students for campus-based programs including McNair Scholars, School of Social Sciences Undergraduate Research Initiative (SSURI), School of Social Sciences Social Action Symposium (SSASy), Koret Foundation training grants, and the CSU pre-doctoral grants.

1. **Assessment**

**3.1 Assessment Methods**

We used a variety of data sources to assess our program. Every spring, we survey all graduating Psychology students from the current academic year (fall, spring and summer terms) about their experiences. This survey includes both indirect assessment of students’ learning as well as a ten-item assessment of direct learning based on questions used as part of the Psychology Graduate Record Examination (<https://www.ets.org/gre/score-users/about/subject-tests.html>, see **Appendix 5** for the complete Senior Exit Survey). Because we serve so many majors, this survey represents our only systematic opportunity to learn about all students’ experiences. We include questions about their motivations for studying psychology, their self-reported skills, their advising experiences, and their plans after graduation. Undergraduate psychology majors and other faculty regularly review and revise this questionnaire. For example, in Spring 2020, a team of undergraduates and Dr. Heather Smith created a new version of the senior exit survey (also employed by several other departments) that directly addressed students’ remote learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to these data, we audited course syllabi for program learning outcomes and writing assignments to help inform our conversation about possible writing enhanced curriculum (WEC) courses, a new requirement at SSU. We also draw upon 1) a published research project (Gomes et al., 2022) that assessed the effectiveness of a media fast used in the *Psy 270,* *Psychology of Self-Discovery* sections taught by Dr. Mary Gomes, 2) the assessment data collected for a new *Psy 490, Psychology of Diversity* class taught by Dr. Wenwen Ni and supported by a Teagle Grant and 3) the assessment data collected by Dr. Matthew Callahan for *Psy 405,* *Psychology of Gender*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

 Finally, we benchmarked our curriculum, number of faculty and majors with other similar sized CSU campuses, Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) members, and local colleges and universities (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11EfVp4XusK9QCF9jQeFDfpc40hlowP3o5dWsObRGHC8/edit?usp=drive\_link), and we drew upon the data available in Tableau and the CSU dashboards for faculty success to document basic department demographics, D, F or Withdrawal (DFW) rates, equity gaps, and whether students entered graduate programs.

**3.1.1. Missing information**

Unfortunately, we do not know the success rates for our students who apply for graduate programs (we only know what percentage of SSU psychology students entered post-graduate programs; we do not know if and how many students unsuccessfully applied for graduate programs). We hope to remedy this problem with an alumni survey (the last alumni survey was conducted in 2006), and/or better institutional data. For example, it would be helpful to know the application and admission rates for SSU Psychology majors to the SSU Counseling program.

We also would like to take advantage of a natural experiment created by the university-based enrollment pressure to accept students who do not meet the department’s 3.0 impaction criteria. We wonder if students who enter the program with GPAs just under the 3.0 requirement are as successful (in time to degree and overall GPA at graduation) as students who meet the 3.0 criteria. We also want to determine whether students who enter Psychology with GPAs above or below 3.0 are similar or different from one another (we worry that the GPA criteria may unintentionally reduce student diversity).

Finally, we hope that we can return to the direct assessment of courses that we began with the 2014 program review, but could not continue given the current full time faculty workload.

* 1. **Summary of findings**
     1. **Senior Exit Survey**

It is important to recognize that not all psychology graduates complete the senior exit survey despite multiple invitations that span six months pre- and post- graduation (the average response rate for the past three years is 24.8%).

The most recent senior exit survey data illustrates the extent to which students come to the psychology department in order to prepare for specific jobs and careers. The top two reasons that students report for pursuing an undergraduate psychology major include preparation for specific job or career (29.4%) and preparation for further study (17.2%). However, only 16.7% mentioned specific graduate training plans in follow-up questions, and only 6.2% reported that they had been accepted into a graduate program. This is significant because many careers in the field of Psychology, such as working as a Marriage & Family Therapist (MFT), require a graduate degree. In the final Reflection section, we highlight potential efforts that can be made in the future to support students’ graduate school aspirations.

Participants gave the highest positive ratings to degree requirement clarity (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 1.00 from 1 to 5), course content relevance (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = 0.95), instruction quality (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = 0.89), the development of mindfulness (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 0.88), and active listening techniques (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = 0.90). They rated the development of their skills to use spreadsheet programs (*M* = 2.34, *SD* = 1.23), data analysis programs (*M* = 1.96, *SD* = 1.28), or to write cover letters and resumes (*M* = 2.47, *SD* = 1.34) the least positively.

To directly assess students’ general psychology knowledge, participants answered ten multiple choice questions selected from the Psychology General Record Examination (often required when applying to graduate programs in Psychology). On average, respondents from 2016 through 2023 answered 63% of these questions correctly (*SD* = 21.85). Respondents were most likely to answer the two research methods questions correctly (75% and 76%), perhaps because all students take a lower division Psychological Research Methods course as a part of the major, and this material is reinforced in upper division psychology courses. Students were least likely to answer questions about late life intellectual changes (50%) and neurotransmitters (55%) correctly, perhaps showcasing that the department does not currently offer a Developmental Psychology class on adulthood or gerontology, or have a tenure-track Cognitive/Physiological Psychology faculty member. As one might expect, those who reported higher major GPAs and overall GPAs answered more questions correctly. Older students, transfer students, and students who were not first-generation college students also answered more questions correctly compared to younger students, students who entered SSU as freshmen, and first-generation college students. Whether a student was from an under-represented group, gender, and whether they worked while going to school or not did not predict their scores on these knowledge questions.

* + 1. **Spring 2023 Syllabi Audit**

An audit of the Spring 2023  course syllabi showed that all syllabi for the department listed either course learning outcomes or department learning outcomes. Of the course syllabi evaluated, 20 out of 32 (62.5%) only listed course learning outcomes, 7 out of 32 (22%) listed department learning outcomes (with some syllabi showing which department learning outcomes the course fulfilled) and 5 syllabi out of 32 (16%) included both department and course learning outcomes.

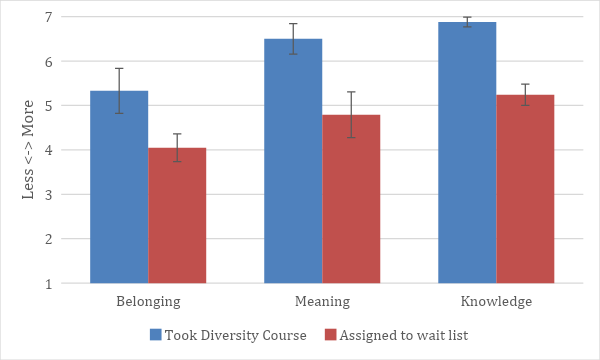
* + 1. **Single Course Assessments**

*Psychology of Self-Discovery.* In 2020, Dr. Mary Gomes and three psychology major alumni published an assessment of the four day electronic media fast that Dr. Gomes employs in her sections of *Psy 270, Psychology of Self-Discovery*.[[6]](#footnote-6) They analyzed the four page reflection papers that 22 students wrote about their efforts to significantly reduce their use of screen media for four consecutive days. Students reported improved sleep, deeper connections with friends, improved focus on single tasks, and greater awareness of the present moment. This peer reviewed publication in the flagship *Teaching of Psychology* journal describes the best way to implement this assignment, supports the assignment with theory and data, and gives readers access to the original materials. This published summary confirms that students in these course sections meet the department learning outcome to reflect on personal experience in light of psychological knowledge. Unfortunately, not all *Psy 270* sections include the media fast as an assignment.

*Psychology of Diversity*. Since 2014, department faculty have created several well-received courses centered around diverse populations including *Multicultural Psychology* (Velasquez), *Diversity Leadership* (Velasquez), and *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* (Nguyen).  However, the department continued to discuss the possibility of a single required course that focuses on the psychology of diversity. Therefore, with the support of a Teagle grant, three departmental faculty designed a new course to address the department’s diversity mission (<https://psychology.sonoma.edu/about-psychology>) and two new department learning outcomes; 5)  identify the Big 8 plus diversity groups, and analyze their effects on interpersonal and intergroup dynamics and 6) recognize and respond to instances of explicit and subtle bias and discrimination in personal and professional contexts. In Spring 2022, Dr. Ni taught the inaugural version of this course. To assess the course effectiveness, we randomly assigned interested students to either take the Spring 2022 course, or wait until Fall 2022 to take the course. By randomly assigning students to the course or the waitlist, we could compare the outcomes of interested students who took the course with interested students who did not take the course. Dr. Martinez designed and collected the assessment data from students both within and outside of the course, ensuring that the instructor who taught the course (in this case, Dr. Ni) could not bias the course assessment. Both groups of students, those assigned to the course or the waiting list, completed the online assessment at the beginning and end of the semester.

At the end of the Spring 2022 semester, students in the *Psychology of Diversity* course reported (1) a stronger sense of belonging at SSU; (2) a greater sense of meaning in life; and (3) more knowledge and comfort regarding diversity of all types, compared to students assigned to the waitlist (see Figure 1). Although the total sample size of 20 students is small, these differences are statistically significant and large (average effect size / Cohen’s *D* = 1.22). In addition, the average student evaluation rating for the course (81% response rate) was 4.9 out of 5; an impressive rating for a course taught for the first time.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Figure 1.**  
*Mean ratings (and standard errors) for students who took course and students who did not*



*Psychology of Gender.* In Fall 2023, as a direct assessment of the department learning outcome 6, to recognize and respond to instances of explicit and subtle bias and discrimination in personal and professional contexts, Dr. Callahan embedded  a short answer question in a course exam based on an April 2018 incident in which a White woman called the local police about a group of African-American/Black people using a public park grill that they had reserved. The grading rubric distinguished among answers that clearly distinguished between implicit stereotype activation and explicit endorsement of racial stereotypes from answers that were less clear, or showed that the student did not understand the difference between the two concepts. Of 35 students, 23 students met the learning outcome, 7 wrote answers that were less clear and three did not meet the learning outcome. As we write below, this embedded exam question could be adopted by instructors who identify their courses as demonstrating the same department learning outcome.

* 1. **Changes to Curriculum**

We have not made any changes to the department curriculum structure that we adopted in 2014. Furthermore, because of limited resources and faculty expertise, we have not been able to offer all the courses listed in the course catalog. For example, we last offered *Psy 445, Advanced Research Design & Analysis* in Fall 2019. We also have not offered *Psy 499, Jungian Psychology*, *Psy 470, Psychology of Film*, *Psy 430, Depth Oriented Psychotherapies*, and *Psy 408, Transitions in Adult Development* regularly.

However, in response to students’ changing interests and demographic backgrounds, the department has significantly increased the number of courses that address our department learning outcomes around diversity, equity and inclusion. Most important, in Fall 2020, the department hired two assistant professors who have the expertise and interest to solidify the department’s commitment to these department learning outcomes.

We are concerned about SSU’s new requirement that departments provide enough WEC (writing enhanced courses) for their majors to meet the CSU system-required graduate writing assessment requirement (GWAR). Due to large class sizes and the majority of upper-division courses being taught by part-time instructors, there is a dearth of writing instruction in our upper division courses. Our syllabi analysis shows that 14 out of 32 syllabi analyzed (44%) offered **no** writing-based papers or assignments (other than items such as short discussion board posts). Other than three courses (*Psy 405*, *Psychology of Gender, Psy 327*, *Psychology of Organizations, Psy 410, Child Development*) that our tenured faculty have offered to adapt into WEC courses, we could find no other courses that could potentially qualify for classification as a WEC course. Even if all three courses regularly enroll 25 students each term, we will not be able to meet student demand. Obtaining resources in order to support WEC courses (perhaps by supporting a faculty member to teach an upper-division writing-intensive research methods course) would assist us in alleviating this problem.

Another option to meet the WEC requirement is to change our lower-division core course, *Psy* 270, *Psychology of Self-Discovery*, to an upper-division course and turn it into a WEC course. This would enable us to meet the university’s new WEC requirement without adding any additional required courses to our curriculum, since *Psy 270* is already a required course for the major. *Psy 270* is also the only lower-division Psychology course that must be taken at SSU (all other courses can be completed at a community college or another university) so moving it to upper division would not affect transfer students who are already encouraged to take *Psy 270* as soon as they arrive at SSU.

However, moving *Psy 270* to upper division would result in a change for students who enter SSU as first year students, because they would not be able to take upper division courses until they reached their junior year (currently, majors can enroll in *Psy 270* as second year students). Also, designating *Psy 270* as a WEC course will require the standardization of the course across sections (to ensure enough writing is included to meet WEC requirements) and the development of a learning agreement for this course, something that is currently in progress but not yet completed.

* + 1. **Comparison to Other Psychology Programs**

As part of program review, Dr. Ni worked with a team of two undergraduate research assistants to compile data about other Psychology programs across the nation, including selected CSUs, all COPLAC institutions, and local universities. We collected data on other programs’ major size, whether the program was impacted, offered a minor, the number of full-time and part-time faculty, as well as lower-division and upper-division course requirements. In addition, we also collected data on whether internships and honors programs were offered, as well as the programs’ learning outcomes (see https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11EfVp4XusK9QCF9jQeFDfpc40hlowP3o5dWsObRGHC8/edit?usp=drive\_link).

In contrast to the SSU Psychology major, seven out of nine local programs and seven out of nine COPLAC programs offer upper division research methods courses. Two out of nine local programs offer capstone courses or require a senior honors thesis; and nine of nine COPLAC programs offer capstone courses or require a senior honors thesis. However, these comparison programs also report significantly lower faculty student ratios in comparison to our program.

* 1. **Assessment of Program Goals Outside Student Learning**

The senior exit survey provides information about students’ credit-bearing experiences outside of class, including unpaid community-based internships and research assistantships. Students’ satisfaction with community based internships was high, but only 6.6% of students reported participation (over 50% of senior exit survey participants reported that they did not have the time to pursue an internship). Students who served as research assistants (18.1%) also reported high levels of satisfaction. Both community-based internships and research assistantships are unpaid but students can receive course credit for their participation. Because unpaid work has the potential to increase equity gaps based on students’ social class background, the department is exploring ways to offer payment to students for research assistantships.

In 2018, we added an 18 item scale to the senior exit survey (*alpha* = .83) that is designed to measure people’s attitudes toward group-based distributions of advantages and disadvantages (based on the *Big 8* of race/ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion and socio-economic status). Overall recognition of group-based advantages and disadvantages is consistently high (*M* = 5.60, *SD* = 0.73 from 1 to 7). Exploratory analyses reveal no statistically reliable differences based on age, ethnic background (recoded into minority and majority ethnic backgrounds), first generation college student status, income level or GPA. There is a slight tendency for male identified respondents to endorse these items less strongly in comparison to female identified and non-binary respondents. We think that these high numbers indicate that the increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion is effective.

* 1. **Proposed Changes to Assessment Strategies**

The 2014 Department Program review included direct assessment of *Psychological Research Methods* (when it was an upper division course rarely taken at other colleges and universities), *Social Psychology*, and *Psychology of Religion*. Unfortunately, limited resources and personnel have meant that these efforts have not continued. However, the embedded short answer exam question used for *Psychology of Gender* offers a model that could be extended to other courses and other department learning outcomes.

It will be particularly important for the department to explore direct assessment of Psy 270, *Psychology of Self Discovery,* for two reasons. First, it is the only course that all SSU psychology majors take. Therefore, it is the best opportunity to determine if **all** majors meet particular student learning outcomes. Second, it will help the department determine whether this course can meet the WEC requirements. One question is whether to focus on the assessment of the improvement of writing mechanics, course content, or both.

In addition to direct assessment, the department plans to revise the current senior exit survey to capture the department’s learning outcomes for diversity and reflections on one’s inner experiences (perhaps operationalized as mindfulness practices). It also will be important to improve the survey response rates if possible. Finally, if and when there are resources, the department plans to survey department alumni as an additional way to contextualize the alumni data reported on Tableau and CSU dashboard.

1. **Faculty**

**4.1. Full Time Faculty Expertise**

Below, we briefly summarize the teaching and research interests of our eight full-time faculty members. Full time faculty CVs are included in the **Appendix 6** folder.

**Dr. Glenn Brassington** (PhD, Clinical Psychology, University of Missouri) was hired in 2002 in the areas of mind-body psychology and clinical psychology. His teaching, research, clinical work, and service focus on promoting health and enhancing human performance through the combination of Eastern and Western mind-body philosophies and practices.  Courses that he teaches include: *Health Psychology*, *Peak Performance Psychology*, and *Psychopathology.*His scholarship interests include optimal performance, sleep, and emotional resilience, particularly among members of underrepresented groups.

**Dr. Melissa Garvin** (PhD, Child Development, University of Minnesota) was hired in 2011. Her area of expertise is parent-child relationships among internationally adopted children.  She focuses on infant and early childhood development, with a special interest in adolescence as a unique developmental period. Courses that she teaches include: *Child Development*, *Infant Development, Lifespan Development*, and *Adolescent Development*.

**Dr. Mary Gomes** (PhD, Social Personality Psychology, Stanford University) was hired in 1994 in the areas of transpersonal psychology and ecopsychology. Currently she focuses on three main areas: 1) the psychology of mindfulness and compassion; 2) depth approaches to self-discovery; and 3) ecopsychology. Courses that she teaches include: *Psychology of Self-Discovery*, *Myth, Dream and Symbol*, and *Ecopsychology*.

**Dr. Andy Martinez** (PhD, Social Personality Psychology, University of California, Berkeley) joined the department as a tenure-track faculty hire in 2020. His theory-driven, empirical research investigates social cognition (focusing on dehumanization) and emotion (focusing on empathy and happiness). Courses that he teaches include: *Psychology of Self-Discovery*, *Psychological Research Methods, Social Psychology,* and *History of Psychology*.

**Dr. Teresa Nguyen** (PhD, Clinical Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles) was hired in 2019 in the areas of clinical psychology, diversity science, and intimate relationships. Her research specifically focuses on understanding the experiences of couples and families who are economically and socially marginalized as well as the influence of stress (e.g., discrimination stress, financial stress, work stress) on relationship quality. She also has examined the interplay between these external forces and couples’ communication patterns. Courses that she teaches include: *Introduction to Counseling*, *Psychopathology, Counseling the Culturally Diverse,* and *Diverse Couples in Therapy.*

**Dr. Wenwen Ni** (PhD, Social Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles) was hired in 2020 to teach the department’s two lower-division core courses, as well as courses in her areas of expertise: diversity and intergroup relations. Courses that she teaches include: *Psychology of Self-Discovery, Psychological Research Methods* and *The Psychology of Diversity.*Dr. Ni’s research is focused on social inequities, particularly in the area of social class.

**Dr. Matthew Paolucci Callahan** (PhD, Social Psychology, Pennsylvania State University) was hired in 2009 in social/multicultural psychology and research methods. His areas of expertise are in gender bias in STEM, sexism, sexual orientation, and prejudice toward gender and sexual minorities. Courses that he currently teaches include: the *Psychology of Self-Discovery* and the *Psychology of Gender*. His recent research projects focus on the reduction of gender bias and sexual harassment (NSF funded) and a newly developed program of qualitative research on the experiences of CSU undergraduates reporting of sexual harassment to Title IX.

**Dr. Heather** **Smith** (PhD, Social Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz) was hired in 1997 to develop and teach research methods courses. Courses that she teaches include: *Psychological Research Methods,* and *Psychology in Organizations*. Her research interests include organizational justice, social comparisons and intergroup relations, topics that she and her colleagues (including SSU undergraduates) have investigated with experiments, surveys, “daily experience diaries” and meta-analyses.

During the last program review cycle, Dr. Smith served as the Institutional Review Board chair (one course release a term), During the last program review cycle, Dr. Smith served as the Institutional Review Board chair (one course release a term). Dr. Callahan served as an instructional consultant, and then the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Center for Teaching and Educational Technology (two course releases a term 2018-2023). He transitioned to one course release per term in 2023 to better support the department’s curricular needs. Dr. Garvin has served as a Community Engagement Faculty Fellow beginning in 2017, a lead Faculty Fellow from 2020 to 2023, and the Faculty Director of Service Learning (from Fall 2023, with one course release a term or stipend), and Dr. Gomes served as the University Research, Tenure and Promotion Review Committee Chair (six units release each academic year) and University Sustainability Chair (six units release each academic term). Faculty hired as assistant professors receive one course release each term for their first two years. After six years of service, faculty can apply for sabbatical leave, and faculty also have successfully applied for single term course releases for scholarship or “extraordinary service” (as defined in the collective bargaining agreement).

In December 2023, the university hired **Evan Lintz** (ABD, Cognitive Psychology, University of Nebraska) to begin as a full time assistant professor in Fall 2024. The department also relies on a set of long time part time instructors who regularly teach *Introduction to Psychology,* supervise the community internship program, and lead the *Careers in Psychology* class. In Fall 2023, the department hired 16 different part time instructors to cover the curriculum that the 8 full time faculty could not. Because of their help, the student-faculty ratio for classes is reasonable. Unfortunately, these part time instructors are not compensated for advising students (including writing recommendation letters), department and university service, or to support the types of experiences outside the classroom that will help our students succeed.

* 1. **Faculty Numbers**

The Psychology department ***does not*** have the number of faculty required to meet our program’s student learning outcomes. In 2014 the Psychology department had 10 tenured / tenure track faculty - now we are down to eight. Psychology is one of the only majors on campus, if not the only major, where enrollments have remained stable or even increased despite SSU’s current enrollment crisis. This is because the Psychology department has lowered our impaction criteria (by removing an admissions essay and lowering the minimum GPA from 3.0 to 2.8 and sometimes lower) in order to admit more students into the major and support the university.

As a result, Psychology currently has the ***highest ratio*** of tenured / tenure track faculty to full-time enrolled students (FTES), and the ***highest ratio*** of tenured / tenure track faculty to majors, of all departments on campus as of the 2022-2023 academic year (see Table 3 for comparisons with other selected departments). After Evan Lintz joins the department in Fall 2024, the advising ratio will drop from 79 students for each full time faculty member to 70 students – a ratio still higher in comparison to other departments.

**Table 3**

*Fall 2023 Comparison With Other SSU Programs*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Department | Psychology | Business | Kinesiology | Communication |
| Tenure Track Faculty (TT) | 8 | 20 | 4 | 5 |
| Tenure Track Full Time Estimate (FTEF) | 8 | 19.5 | 4 | 5 |
| Lecturer Full Time Estimate (FTEF) | 6.8 | 4 | 3.4 | 2.3 |
| Tenure Density | 55% | 83% | 54% | 68% |
| Majors | 623 | 1068 | 297 | 206 |
| Majors/ TT FTEF | 79 | 54.8 | 74.2 | 41.2 |
| FTES | 454.9 | 581.5 | 145.7 | 153.4 |
| SFR | 31.2 | 26.4 | 22.9 | 21.0 |

*Source.* Provost Summary for University Re-Organization Proposal and Fall 2023 Tableau data.

This extremely high faculty/student ratio means that the Psychology department has had to severely limit the breadth and depth of course offerings, as well as the programs offered. The Psychology minor was discontinued in 2020. The department discontinued a Master of Arts degree focused on Depth Psychology in Fall 2023 (Master of Arts degrees in Art Therapy and Humanistic Psychology were discontinued in 2008 and 2007 respectively).  From the early 1990s to 2013, the department housed the Gerontology minor (discontinued in 2019) and the Organizational Development Master’s program (moved to the Hutchins School in 2011). From 2005 to 2008, the department offered a Human Development minor (now its own major housed in the Anthropology department).

In addition, due to the high student / faculty ratio, class sizes have increased (for example, from 2020 to 2022, *Psy 280* class sizes increased from 25 to 30 students) and the department has not been able to participate in any small interdisciplinary first or second year programs. The department is also limited in contributing to the campus in the number of GE courses offered - currently the department only offers two - *Psy 250,* *Introduction to Psychology*, and *Psy 325,* *Social Psychology*. Last of all, in order to keep as many Psychology faculty teaching in the classroom as possible, the Psychology department’s current Chair is a member of the Sociology department.

Although the Psychology department has been successful in hiring four Assistant Professors (one clinical psychologist in 2019, two social psychologists in 2020, and a cognitive psychologist for Fall 2024), the department has also been faced with faculty turnover in the form of retirements. One faculty member retired in Spring 2024, another faculty member (our previous Department Chair) retired at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, and three faculty members are expected to retire in the next 5 to 10  years. Unfortunately, this time line replicates a pattern that has plagued the department. Sets of two to three faculty are hired at the “last minute” to replace faculty who will retire, and there are few faculty who are hired in between those emergencies. As a result, for example, the Psychology department currently has no Associate Professors.

It is tempting to argue that (long time) part time instructors and department advisors can compensate for the limited tenure track faculty. Certainly, the department benefits from gifted and committed part time instructors who draw upon their experience to teach courses to majors. Similarly, Cem Burnham, a full time department advisor hired in Fall 2022, has provided undergraduate majors with consistent and useful advice.

However, it is important to recognize that tenure track faculty do much more than teach students in the classroom. They supervise research teams, advise clubs, observe peers, create and assess the curriculum, and write letters of recommendation. They contribute disciplinary scholarship and service, attend professional conferences (with and without students), mentor students for campus presentations and scholarship opportunities, and apply for internal and external funding. They serve on local community boards, present community workshops, and participate as peer reviewers, journal editors, and professional organization representatives. Finally, they engage in the shared governance and other university service that enables SSU to succeed. One reason that it has taken ten years for the department to conduct a program review is the limited number of tenure track faculty to take on this work.

* 1. **Support for Faculty Professional Development**

The Psychology department, the School of Social Sciences, and the university all provide support for faculty professional development. New faculty members receive startup funds, as well as a course release every semester for the first two years so that they can devote more time to scholarship. The department also has a Hansen fund that can be used to support conference travel as well as research expenses and other professional development activities (subscriptions to journals, etc.). Faculty also receive access to research space in Stevenson Hall.

The School of Social Sciences supports faculty professional development by providing conference funding which faculty can apply for, as well as $1,000 Dean’s Summer Research Awards. The School of Social Sciences also has a summer research program (SSURI) in which faculty receive funding for working with teams of two students on a research project during the summer.

At the university level, faculty can apply for various grants, including summer funding through the Research, Scholarship and Creative Activities Program (RSCAP), as well as the Koret Scholars Program, which funds a team comprised of a faculty member and up to four students working on a year-long project together. Faculty have also received funding for acting as faculty mentors for McNair Scholars, as well as completing professional development activities such as attending CTET’s summer Canvas training during the pivot to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple faculty members in the department (Martinez, Ni & Smith) also received a Teagle grant to develop a new course (*Psy 490*, *Psychology of Diversity*) for the department, as well as Educational Experience Enhancement Awards (Nguyen, Ni). Last of all, faculty have access to teaching and professional development opportunities via the Center for Teaching & Educational Technology (CTET).

1. **Program Resources**

Before we review the department resources, it is vital to remember that we have eight full time faculty and 623 majors. This is a ratio of 79 students to one full time faculty, an even worse ratio than was reported in the previous 2014 program review. The closest program to Psychology in terms of size, the School of Business, reports 20 full time faculty and 1068 majors, in addition to their full time advisor (see Table 3). This is a ratio of 55 to 1. The Kinesiology Department, which also discontinued all their graduate programs, reports 4 full time faculty and 297 majors, for a ratio of 74 to 1. Communication, another program identified in the recent Academic Master Plan report for Current and New Programs as ready for growth, reports five full time faculty and 206 majors, with an advising ration of 41 to 1. As illustrated n Table 3, **the Psychology major has the highest student to full-time faculty ratio for any major on campus.**

Full time faculty do their best to manage the workload; there is just one required course that all psychology students must take at SSU, we offer group advising, we regularly observe the large number of part time instructors who we must hire to cover the curriculum, we have impaction criteria in place and actively encourage students to consider other majors, we closed the psychology minor, and we limit our direct assessment to the senior exit survey and individual faculty led research projects. However, program quality has suffered, and psychology majors do not get the same experience that SSU students who major in other departments and programs do.

**5.1. Advising Support**

Advising in the department is currently split between a Psychology academic advisor (Cem Burnham) and full time Psychology faculty. In Fall 2022, Ryan Walsh in Student Affairs advised lower-

division Psychology majors, whereas Cem Burnham did GE advising and graduation checks for upper-

division Psychology students. As of Spring 2024, the SSU Advising Center advises first year Psychology majors, while Cem Burnham does GE advising and graduation checks for second through fourth year Psychology majors. Full-time Psychology faculty do major advising (i.e., advising students which classes to take in the major based on their academic, personal, and research interests) and graduate school advising for upper-division Psychology students. In addition, psychology majors who qualify also receive support from campus resources such as TRIO Student Support Services, CAPS and Disabled Student Services (DSS). It remains unclear who is responsible for advising prospective students (both before and after they are accepted by the university). At times this responsibility has fallen on Psychology faculty, adding to the current work overload.

Our best information about advising quality comes from the Senior Exit Survey. The most recent analysis indicates that respondents are generally satisfied with faculty advising (*M* = 5.30, *SD* = 1.53 for a scale that ranges from 1, extremely dissatisfied, to 7, extremely satisfied). However, 29.1% of respondents only saw a faculty advisor once or twice during their academic career, and 16.3% never saw a faculty advisor. We are currently in the process of tracking how many students faculty advisors see in their office hours each semester.

Respondents most frequently saw faculty advisors for help with their academic requirements report, advice for GE courses and choosing major courses. Over 50% of respondents wished that they had discussed graduate school training and specific graduate school programs with faculty advisors. The Psychology department does attempt to offer at least one panel presentation about applying to graduate programs every academic year. Most students who attend these sessions are primarily interested in Clinical / Counseling graduate programs (either MFT or PhD / PsyD programs).

* 1. **Research Assistants and Community Internship Support**

Of the current eight tenure track faculty, five have active research programs involving undergraduates. The SSU Psychology website includes a webpage where faculty can post research projects that require student assistance (https://psychology.sonoma.edu/research-participation). Students either volunteer or receive course credit through *Psy 481* *Research Internship* for this work. Undergraduates and recent alumni often volunteer their time in order to gain direct research experience in support of their career goals. The student research teams supervised by professors who have research labs, especially for those with external funding, typically range between six and eighteen members. In addition, Teresa Nguyen has used external grants funded by the American Psychological Association and Matthew Callahan has used an external grant funded by the National Science Foundation to cover the salaries of undergraduate lab managers (who do not receive course credit).

There is also sometimes funding available for research assistants through SSU programs such as Koret or McNair. During the 2022-2023 Academic Year, faculty sponsored three McNair scholars, 12 Koret scholars and two School of Social Science Undergraduate Research Initiative (SSURI) scholars. The Barry Godolphin Research Assistantship (created by an alumnus to honor an emeritus professor who taught research methods)typically covers students’ travel expenses to professional conferences.

* 1. **Library and CTET Support**

Faculty receive support any teaching-related issue from the Center of Teaching and Educational Technology (CTET). Teaching support includes free instructional consultations from CTET’s faculty fellows, inclusive teaching support from the faculty fellow for inclusive teaching, workshops on topics such teaching with AI, trauma-informed teaching, supporting transgender students, and a retention focused group for under presented faculty. CTET’s instructional designers provide support for Canvas (the campus learning software) issues. During the shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, several Psychology faculty participated in the CTET Canvas Design Summer Institute. The Summer Institute contained two 40 hour courses (Level 1 and Level 2) that taught faculty the basics of Canvas design of online courses, including basic course layout, assessment options, course engagement tools, resources for student success, as well as the accessibility of course materials.

In addition, as part of teaching and scholarship, faculty and students use SSU library’s Psychology databases such as PsycInfo, statistical packages such as SPSS, and the online internet survey program, Qualtrics. For example, as a part of *Psy 280, Psychological Research Methods,* students may be taught how to conduct literature reviews through the SSU Library’s Psychology databases. Faculty who teach research methods often reserve student computer labs in order to access these different resources.

* 1. **Space and Equipment**

Tenured and tenure-track professors have access to research space in the new Stevenson Hall. New assistant professors (beginning with a 2015 hire) are now offered startup funds that can be used to equip the space for research studies. For example, Dr. Teresa Nguyen has an observational research space complete with a one way mirror for her Sonoma Marriage lab. A second space with a sink is reserved for the Fall 2024 Cognitive/Physiological area hire. The other four research spaces have been assigned to four full-time faculty who requested to use the space for their work with undergraduate students. If the department hires additional faculty who plan to conduct basic psychological research, six spaces will not be enough and we will require additional space.

We conceptualize department research spaces as learning spaces for students *and* faculty. After all, a key purpose of empirical research is learning. However, the recent Academic Master Planning Report about learning spaces raises concerns (https://academicaffairs.sonoma.edu/provost/academic-master-plan/amp-learning-spaces-technologies-working-group). The report recommends that any university learning space must meet minimal equipment and accessibility standards. Unfortunately, in practice, this recommendation for “minimal equipment standards” means that faculty do not have computers and software for their research. Specifically, IT deems any computers that does not meet current university defined requirements as needing to be “scrapped”. However, there is no mechanism for faculty to replace these computers with new computers that meet the required standards. Sometimes, IT and/or Computer Science give department faculty the computers that they no longer use. Sometimes, department faculty have been able to leverage their startup funds or the overhead associated with external funding to purchase equipment. And sometimes, department faculty with particular areas of expertise have received overhead or donor money to purchase special equipment.

The Academic Master Planning Report also recommends that the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTET) serve as the project manager for any upgrades and the home for “academic” software used by instructors for courses. The report does not mention a plan for any software and internet based services associated with scholarship. Instead, individual researchers must complete a lengthy approval process for any software program or service even if IT has approved the same program or service for a different project.

A second research challenge is to recruit student volunteers. For example, many researchers would like to reward student volunteers with gift cards or other types of compensation. However, the university now requires that any monetary based reward given to student research volunteers, no matter the form or the size, should be counted as a part of their financial aid package, making it administratively and ethically challenging to distribute gift cards to students. However, as first proposed in 2014, the department will implement an IRB approved pilot participant pool project in Spring 2024. Students who enroll in *Psy 250, Introduction to Psychology* courses will be asked to volunteer for one or two research projects as part of the course requirements (they can opt to review journal articles if they prefer not to participate). We hope that regular access to student volunteers will increase faculty and student opportunities to do original research at SSU.

* 1. **Departmental Support Staff**

Prior to 2014, Psychology had two full-time support staff for the department. One staff member assisted with faculty administrative needs and the other staff member served as the first departmental administrative contact for students and visitors. Now we share a single staff support person with Women and Gender Studies (WGS). This single person must handle administrative needs as well as serve as the first point of contact for two departments.

* 1. **Program Needs**

The Psychology department’s limited resources impact the quality of the program offered to psychology majors. Full time faculty are expected to adequately advise between 60 and 80 undergraduates, a part time instructor coordinates the community internship program because there is no full time faculty available for this position, and student opportunities to participate in discipline relevant research are severely limited because faculty are not required, compensated, or recognized for doing this work (for example, it is not included as part of the department’s current RTP criteria). It is impossible for full time faculty to offer all psychology majors the close faculty-student relationships that the university promises as a public liberal arts college.

Therefore, the most pressing current program need is to increase the number of tenure-track faculty in the department. The department has a new tenure-track hire starting in Fall 2024 and will also put in a request to hire an additional tenure-track faculty member to start in Fall 2025. Baring this, another option is to decrease the number of majors in the department by moving the impaction criteria back to 3.0 or above, but given that Psychology is a major targeted for growth by the university and its consultants, this seems unlikely to occur.

Another urgent and substantial program need is to relieve the advising pressure on the department’s sole academic advisor (Cem Burnham) as well as tenure-track faculty. Currently, Cem and tenure-track faculty advise all Sophomore, Junior and Senior Psychology majors, with first year students being seen at the Advising and Transfer Center. Previously, all lower-division Psychology students had been assigned to SSU Advising – the addition of Sophomores to Cem’s responsibilities has created an increase in workload for Cem and a spillover effect for the tenure-track faculty, who are now meeting with the students that Cem does not have the bandwidth to advise.

1. **Student Success**

**6.1. Student Population**

In Fall 2023, there were 623 Psychology majors, out of 1,619 undergraduates in the School of Social Sciences and 5,867 undergraduates enrolled at SSU. Majors include 74.8% who identified as women and 25.2% who identified as men, compared to 61.6% of SSU undergraduates who identify as women and 38.4% who identify as men (**Appendix 7** summarizes student characteristics across time). Note that this gender imbalance reflects a pattern that has remained consistent across the years, and mirrors the national trend for psychology to have a greater percentage of women compared to other majors.

**Figure 2.**

*Psychology Major Basic Demographic Characteristics*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

*Note.* We are not able to present nonbinary gender identities, or parse differences within the “other ethnicity” category.

In Fall 2023, 45.2% of psychology majors identified as non-Hispanic Whites, 40.1% as Latinx, 4.3% as Asian or Asian-American, 2.1% as Black/African-American, 0.5% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, 0.5% Native American, 4.7% as two or more races, and 2.6% unknown. This distribution reflects increased student diversity compared to the 2014 program review when 63% of students identified as non-Hispanic White; 19% Latinx; 3% Asian-American; and 2% Black/African-American. Our current distribution is similar to the demographic distribution for all SSU undergraduates in Fall 2023 (41.8% non-Hispanic White, 40% Latinx, 5.4% Asian American, and 2.9% Black/African American). In Fall 2023, 28% percent of psychology majors identified as first generation college students (c.f., 29% for all SSU undergraduates). Finally, 28.3% of psychology majors report being first generation college students (c.f., 28.9% for all SSU undergraduates).

As shown in Figure 2, the major is dominated by upper division students. Over 47.4% of the majors are enrolled in 15 or more units per term, 29.5% are enrolled in 13 to 14 units a term, 13.3% are enrolled in 12 units a term and 7.1% are enrolled in 7 to 11 units a term; majors report an average GPA of 3.31.

Because the Psychology Department serves a large number of majors, CSU dashboard and Tableau data are especially useful resources. Unfortunately, we are unable to access data about the percentage of students who receive Pell Grants, or students’ age distribution (these were requests that were included in SSU’s Program Review template). Furthermore, we cannot make further comparisons among groups of students (e.g., female identified White students compared to female identified students from other racial backgrounds) or determine how demographic characteristics might be correlated (e.g., are first generation college students more likely to be Pell grant recipients? Are men more likely to be first generation college students?)

Data from the most recent senior exit survey indicates that a majority of psychology students work (64.2%), typically between 20 and 29 hours a week. These respondents report having just 6 to 10 hours a week for coursework (outside of class), despite a university wide assumption that a full course load of 15 units means that students have 30 hours outside of class to complete readings, assignments and other coursework. Faculty members report that students are increasingly stressed and anxious about how to integrate class assignments and class projects into their working lives.

* 1. **Applications**

In Fall 2023, 13% of the first time students who were admitted to SSU and the major enrolled (95 of 713 admitted students). 34% of transfer students who were admitted to SSU and the major enrolled (114 of 335 admitted students). The most frequent alternative choices for enrollment for first year first time student applicants who did not enroll at SSU were CSU Chico, Sacramento State University, UC Santa Cruz, San Francisco State University and UC Merced. The most frequent alternative choices for enrollment for the transfer applicants who did not enroll at SSU were Sacramento State University, UC Davis, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University and CSU East Bay.

* 1. **Student Experiences**
     1. **D, F and Withdrawal rates**

The average DFW rate for classes is 9% or less with one exception (course DFW rates are listed in **Appendix 8**). The DFW rates since remote learning began have increased to 18% for *Psy 250, Introduction to Psychology*.In 2017, the DFW rate for this class was 5% (note that this course was offered on line when the university instituted remote learning). Direct assessment of the signature assignment introduced for this course might help the department understand why this is happening.

Inspection of CSU dashboard data indicates that group-based differences in students’ course grades range widely. For example, the course grades for first generation students enrolled in *Psychology of Meditation* are .37 higher compared to other students. For first generation students enrolled in *Cognitive Development*, course grades are .42 lower compared to other students. For students enrolled in *Adolescent Development Through Film*, course grades for students who identify as men are .29 higher compared to students who identify as women. For students enrolled in *Cognitive Development*, those who identified as men reported grades that were .39 lower compared to students who identify as women.  Students who receive Pell Grants received *Stereotyping and Prejudice* course grades that were .22 higher compared to students who did not; students who received Pell Grants reported *Cognitive Development* grades that were .49 lower compared to students who did not. Finally, students with under-represented ethnic backgrounds received *Psychology of Meditation* grades that were .26 higher compared to majority background students. However, students who reported under-represented ethnic backgrounds received *Jungian Psychology* course grades that were .66 lower compared to students from majority ethnic backgrounds.

* + 1. **Graduation and Persistence**

Faculty designed the curriculum adopted in 2014 to minimize any department roadblocks to graduation. CSU dashboard data indicates that 66% of first time first year psychology majors who began in Fall 2017 completed the degree within six years (53% within four years). For comparison, 60.5% of all SSU first year first time students who began in 2017 completed the degree within six years (42.5% within four years). 73% of first time first year psychology majors who began in Fall 2019 completed the degree in four years (six year graduation rate is not yet available). For comparison, 48.5% of all SSU students who began in Fall 2019 completed their degree within four years. Graduation rates for transfer students are even better; 84% of transfer psychology majors who began their SSU career in 2018 graduated within four years. 80% of transfer psychology majors who began their SSU career in 2019 graduated within two years (four year graduation rate is not yet available). For comparison, 84.2% of all transfer students who began their SSU career in 2018 completed their degree within two years and 60% of all transfer students who began their SSU career in 2019 completed their degree within two years (see **Appendix 9** for persistence rates over time).[[8]](#footnote-8)

**6.3.3. Student Clubs**

Students organize and run the local chapter of the Psi Chi National Honors Society (faculty advisor is Dr. Teresa Nugyen).  Every year the society inducts approximately 70 psychology undergraduates as members. Psi Chi offers a speaker series focusing on types of graduate psychology training and pointers on how to be a competitive applicant to graduate school. In Fall 2023, two Psychology majors founded a campus chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) (faculty advisor is Dr. Glenn Brassington). This chapter fosters connections with the local Sonoma County NAMI chapter (<https://namisonomacounty.org/>) in their shared mission to advocate, educate and support those coping with mental illness.

**6.3.4. Internships**

Historically, many students participated in community based internships to gain relevant experience and help local community members. Community partners have included in-patient treatment centers, schools and after-school programs, homeless and rehabilitation agencies, and social service agencies including regional long term care facilities, hospice programs, senior centers, county and state development and regulation agencies as well as sites on the SSU campus such as the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Students can receive course credit through *Psy 499* for internships (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Internship Course Enrollment*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fall 2022 | Spring 2023 | Fall 2023 | Average |
| Enrollment in Psy 481, *Research Assistantships* | 11 | 15 | 8 | 13 |
| Enrollment in Psy 499, *Community Internships* | 15 | 13 | 6 | 14 |
| Total Major enrollment | 655 | 646 | 682 | 650.5 |

The internship program was placed on hold during COVID-19 but restarted in Fall 2022, after the department approved a new community based internship policy designed to mitigate student risk and improve student experience. In Spring 2020 (before the new policy was approved and implemented), 37 psychology majors enrolled in Psy 499. In Fall 2023, seven students were enrolled in the internship program – five at CAPS, one at Forget Me Not Farm, and one at Giant Steps Equestrian Center. As shown in Table 4, the average enrollment over the past three semesters for Psy 499 is 14. These small numbers reflect the relatively few sites that have met the new internship requirements and/or the challenges for students to devote the required hours (as reported in the Senior Exit Survey), especially since these internships are unpaid. In Spring 2020, the internship coordinator received four units of compensation; in Fall 2020, the internship coordinator received two units of compensation, and in Fall 2023, the internship coordinator received one unit of compensation.

Only eight senior exit survey respondents (out of the 165 students who completed the survey) reported completing a department internship for credit. However, they reported enjoying their experience (*M* = 4.22, *SD* = 0.83 on a five point scale). We suspect that the number of students who completed a community based internship for credit has significantly decreased for three reasons. First, before Fall 2022, many students did behavioral interventions with young children in family homes or trauma informed psychotherapy with school children despite the requisite skills falling outside the scope of a traditional Psychology B.A. These unpaid internships do not meet the current university policy criteria. Second, 50% of senior exit survey respondents reported that they did not have enough time to complete an internship even though they could earn four units of psychology major elective credit. Third, there is no full time faculty member responsible for the community internship program. In Spring 2022, the department implemented a new internship policy. Unfortunately, the initial implementation revealed logistical problems (e.g. students promised an internship with a specific agency in the Spring only to be told that there was no spot for them in the Fall) that the department must address. Given the importance of practical experience for careers and graduate training in psychology, this trend is troubling.

A small but growing number of majors serve as research assistants with faculty in the Psychology department either as volunteers or for elective major (pass-fail) credit (*Psy 481*, see Table 4). The 25 senior exit survey respondents who reported research assistant experience enjoyed their experience (*M* = 4.28, *SD* = 0.74 on a five point scale).

**6.3.5. Service Learning**

The department also offers several service learning courses including *Child Development, Careers in Psychology, Diversity Leadership, Autism Theories and Prevention*, and the *Psychology of Creativity* (no longer offered now that Professor Geri Olson has retired). The 42 Senior Exit survey respondents who took a service learning course reported that they somewhat enjoyed the class (*M* = 3.71, *SD* = 1.27 on a five point scale).

**6.4. Student Success**

**6.4.1. Student Recognition**

The department offers several awards to undergraduates for achievement and research. These include the Alden Hanson Spirit of Our Times Essay Competition, the Richard Rodriguez Social Justice Award, and the Barry Godolphin Research Assistantship. In Fall 2022, the donor responsible for the Barry Godolphin Assistantship agreed to expand her definition of eligible projects as part of a post pandemic effort to improve the website (https://psychology.sonoma.edu/GodolphinAward) and application process.Until 2014, the department faculty awarded students with outstanding community and/or academic contributions with department honors. However, it became clear that full time faculty did not know enough about **all** psychology majors to award these honors equitably. Many majors graduate from the program having taken just one or two classes from full time faculty, and the department has no honors course.

**6.4.2. Career Choices**

The clinical/counseling area remains the most popular career choice for majors, with 50.5% of the students who responded to the senior exit survey planning on graduate training in this area (compared to 24.2% reporting interest in psychology graduate training outside of these two areas, 6.1% in a teaching credential, 6.1% in a nursing degree, and one respondent in occupational therapy). However, only 12 respondents reported applying to graduate programs, all in the clinical/counseling area. We worry that most department majors do not get the information that they need to make informed choices about graduate training.

CSU Dashboard data indicates that 37% of psychology department graduates (from any graduation year) enrolled in graduate training between 2016 and 2018 (compared to 25% of all SSU graduates), and Table 5 lists the “institutional homes” of the most frequently chosen graduate programs. Given that most psychology related careers require graduate training, this percentage is not surprising. However, we need more information. First, anecdotal evidence suggests that many graduates enroll in graduate programs (e.g., for statistics and methods training) and/or courses (e.g., Tests and Measurements for School Psychology programs) at other universities that SSU does not provide. Second, anecdotal evidence suggests that many graduates enroll in post baccalaureate nursing programs, psychological assistant programs, EMT programs and other training programs that are not associated with a psychology B.A. degree. Finally, these data do not tell us how many graduates applied unsuccessfully to graduate programs. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that many graduates apply two or three times to PhD programs before they are admitted. More systematic information about department graduates’ experiences would enable us to determine if the department is effectively preparing students for further graduate training.

**Table 5**

*Institutional Homes for Most Popular Post Graduate Enrollment for SSU Psychology majors, 2016 – 2018*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | SSU | |
| |  | | --- | | University Of San Francisco | |
| |  | | --- | | Alliant International University | |
| Brandman University |
| Dominican University of California |
| Arizona State University |
| CSU East Bay |
| San Jose State University |
| National University |

*Note.* Data from CSU dashboard, no information about specific programs or ratios of applications to acceptances.

1. **Reflection and Action Plan**

**7.1. Department Strengths**

**7.1.1. Streamlined Curriculum**

In 2014, the Psychology department adopted a new curriculum that removed prerequisites for many courses and offered students more flexibility in the sequencing of their courses. This has resulted in removing roadblocks to graduation and Psychology is now able to graduate a large number of majors per year. As indicated in our review, the graduation and retention rates for Psychology majors are among the best in the university.

**7.1.2. Advising**

The department’s new advising model, with Cem Burnham as an in-house Psychology advisor for GE and graduation advising and Psychology faculty primarily doing major advising for upper-division students, has been relatively effective in meeting students’ needs. The department also successfully implemented group advising sessions that reached large numbers of majors and decreased the number of individual students seeking appointments with their major full-time faculty advisors. Cem Burnham’s efforts to check all majors’ graduation status and give new students consistent advising advice has improved the students’ advising experiences enormously.

**7.1.3. Science of Well-Being**

The Psychology department’s humanistically oriented courses reflect a popular trend in the field of Psychology, with psychology departments across the country offering coursework in positive psychology and the science of well-bring. Research (see Gray Associates November Report) shows that these courses are popular and interesting to students. The lower division required course, Psychology of Self-Discovery, reflects decades of faculty expertise with experiential learning that is now being integrated with new research and curriculum focused on the science of well-being.

**7.1.4. Increased and Improved Research Space**

The Stevenson Hall renovation has provided increased and improved lab space for Psychology faculty. New Psychology faculty also have access to startup funds for their research. However, questions about how to obtain and maintain equipment remain.

**7.1.5. Faculty Diversity**

The Psychology faculty committed to increasing faculty diversity as the diversity among undergraduate majors increased. The three current Assistant Professors in the Psychology department are all faculty of color who have experience in both teaching and researching diversity issues. This has led to the development of new diversity-based course offerings in the curriculum, such as *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* and *The Psychology of Diversity*. The department used a Teagle grant as an opportunity to directly assess the *Psychology of Diversity* course, and the results were so impressive that faculty are pursuing a second experimental test to confirm the course value, and if confirmed, will share the course design and assessment with professional audiences.

**7.2. Department Weaknesses**

**7.2.1. Curricular Depth**

The Psychology department’s curricular map and list of course offerings expose curricular gaps. For example, there is no capstone or senior seminar course, the upper division research methods course (listed as a department elective) is being discontinued because there is not enough student demand, and there is no opportunity for students to enroll in an honors program or complete an honors thesis. The current curriculum does not indicate how individual breadth areas (or electives) meet different department learning outcomes, and offers no guarantee that individual majors will take the courses that ensure that they meet each of the program learning outcomes.

**7.2.2. Internships and Career Development**

The current internship program, with only six students enrolled and one unit provided for the faculty coordinator, is underdeveloped. In addition, other than a two unit Careers in Psychology elective course, there is no formal career development in the major. This is especially problematic because Psychology students have limited career opportunities in Psychology without obtaining a graduate degree, and our limited anecdotal data about students’ applications to graduate programs and their success rates suggest that students need more support. Even less is known about the experiences of alumni who do not opt for psychology-based graduate training. Other than the counseling/clinical breadth area, the potential contribution of other curricular breadth areas (and electives) to students’ career goals is unclear. Instead, the department relies on students’ meetings with individual faculty advisors as the primary source of career advice, and as indicated by the senior exit survey, there is no guarantee that students will ever meet with a department advisor.

**7.3. Opportunities for Improvement / Growth**

**7.3.1. Continue diversity work**

Given the change in student demographics taking place in the Psychology department in particular and at SSU in general, the Psychology department would like to continue our work in incorporating diversity as a core part of our curriculum. This may include options such as adding diversity-related 490 courses as a regularly-scheduled part of our curriculum, or having a diversity-course requirement for the major. The impressive pilot data for the *Psy 490, Diversity in Psychology* course suggests the value of such a requirement.

The Diversity course assessment also underlines the importance of having a highly trained and competent instructor for this course. Therefore, it will be critical for the department to select instructors with the knowledge and skills to teach this course effectively. Because these types of courses often require difficult conversations that touch upon students’ social self-identities and might challenge their worldviews, values and experiences, it is equally important to provide course instructors with adequate professional development and peer support when class content and conversations become challenging. Because the department may require multiple sections of the *Psychology of Diversity* course to serve student demand, we recommend that all course instructors adopt a shared “signature assignment” that we can assess. One possible signature assignment is the course final reflection paper in which students describe the different identities that they, a person they know well, or a public figure have and how these identities intersect. Students draw upon this analysis and what they have learned to predict the person’s thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and different life paths.

The psychology department is also considering the best ways to infuse diversity in a wider variety of courses (while keeping academic freedom in mind) and working to identify and target equity gaps in our courses. This focus also might be an opportunity to revise the department’s mission statement so that it reflects the department’s current priorities.

**7.3.2. More Direct Assessment and Information about Students/Alumni**

The psychology department would like to conduct more direct assessment of our student learning outcomes, either through edits to the Senior Exit Survey or via course-specific assessments (perhaps using the Psychology of Gender direct assessment as a model). More information about alumni outcomes after graduation (e.g., percentage of students going into particular graduate programs) would be helpful. Unfortunately, the CSU dashboard and Tableau data that we could access does not give us the details that we need about graduate school acceptances (e.g., type of graduate program, ratio of applicants to acceptances). It also is difficult to reconcile inconsistencies among different data sources. For example, how does the 35% graduate enrollment reported in the CSU dashboard relate to the 6.2% of SSU senior exit survey respondents who reported applying to any graduate programs, or the anecdotal challenges that full time faculty advisors have heard? Finally, given the number of majors, we depend upon dashboard and tableau data for information about students’ experiences. It would be helpful if we could identify Pell Grant recipient status, non-traditional students, and how different demographic categories intersect to shape our majors’ academic outcomes.

**7.3.3. Determine Ideal Balance of Asynchronous and In Person Classes**

Currently, approximately 25% to 30% of courses in the Psychology department are taught online. Asynchronous, bisynchronous or online synchronous classes remain popular among Psychology majors for their flexible structure, and often fill up faster than in-person classes. However, student performance in these courses remains inconsistent, with more students not completing assignments in these courses compared with in-person courses. The department should consider which courses should be taught in-person or online and the ideal balance of in-person and online courses for SSU psychology majors. These discussions can inform the department class modality policy now required by the university.

**7.3.4. Support Undergraduate Research**

Because undergraduate research is recognized as a best practice for improving student engagement, it is not surprising that the number of internal funding and campus presentation opportunities that focus on undergraduate research has increased. Space dedicated to research projects, startup funds, and the reduced course load for the first two years have helped support new faculty hires’ work with undergraduate research assistants. To further support campus based discipline relevant research, a School of Social Sciences committee will pilot a student research participant pool in Spring 2024 for two sections of *Psy 250, Introduction to Psychology*.

If the department (and the university) hope to sustain and grow opportunities for undergraduate research experiences, however, we must figure out a way to recognize and tangibly support faculty who work with undergraduates. At the moment, full time faculty who work with undergraduates are expected to do this work in addition to all the other teaching, advising and service responsibilities that full time faculty who do not work with undergraduates are expected to do. It may not be possible to assign release time to faculty working with undergraduates, but perhaps it is possible to redistribute advising responsibilities, or recognize this work as valuable service. It also is important to recognize how competitive external research funding is for psychologists (success rates are less than 10%). Therefore, faculty need other ways to replace or purchase needed equipment, software, and other research supplies.

**7.3.5. Revise Department Research, Tenure and Promotion Criteria**

The Psychology department is in the process of revising the department’s RTP criteria so that it is clear what the department expects from candidates in terms of teaching (e.g., how many different courses should they teach before they apply for tenure) and scholarship (e.g., how many peer reviewed journal publications or conference presentations are expected). For example, it is unclear whether candidates should treat research with undergraduates as part of their scholarship, service or both. Unfortunately, the current policy sets minimum standards with few guidelines for 1) determining quality, 2) distinguishing promotion from tenure, or 3) setting standards for early promotion. It is also important to understand why previous assistant professors have left the department. The most recent separation in 2021 reflected a poor fit between the SSU emphasis on teaching and advising a wide range of undergraduate students and this faculty member’s preferences. Although other assistant faculty have left because of the high cost of living in our service area, this is the first time that an assistant professor was not a successful tenure candidate.

**7.3.6. More Advising Support**

First, we would like to return to the Fall 2022 – Spring 2023 Academic Advising model when the department first worked with Cem Burnham. In this model, the SSU Advising was responsible for lower-division students, and Cem and full-time faculty were responsible for upper division students. It has been demoralizing to watch the gains that we made with his help disappear.

Second, we think that we can leverage other department advising models to be more effective. For example, we could redistribute some of the advising load by having the full time faculty who do not work with undergraduate research teams do special case advising (e.g., study abroad, interested in social work) or represent the department at student events. This approach could be a way to distribute the workload more equitably. Third, we could introduce workshops, one unit courses, or other events that would enable faculty or department representatives to work with students more efficiently, or earlier in their academic career.

Because the advising ratio has been and most likely will continue to be larger compared to other departments and programs, it is worth considering advising models that are not predicated on the assumption that faculty advisors will be able to work closely with assigned students for their entire academic career (or that faculty advisors will be able to offer individual students the close and regular scheduling advice that they experienced in high school or community college). One solution implemented in Spring 2024 is for each full time faculty member to identify two office hours each week that do not overlap with other full time faculty members. Students would know these hours would be regularly staffed, and could be confident that if “just in time” advising was required, they could find it.

**3.4. Department Action Plan**

Below, we list the three most important issues that the department (and the university) must address if we hope to provide SSU psychology majors with the program that they deserve.

**3.4.1. New Full-time Faculty Hires**

In 2014, the department had 10 full-time faculty members for 645 majors and as noted in that program review, the tenured / tenure-track faculty numbers then were insufficient for a quality undergraduate program. The department recommended increasing full-time faculty members to 15 - three full-time faculty members in each of our five breadth areas.

Now, 10 years later, not only has the Psychology department not been able to increase our number of full-time faculty, our numbers have actually decreased to 8 full-time faculty while still supporting over 600 majors. This is the highest student:full-time faculty ratio for any major at SSU and is a much higher student:full-time faculty ratio compared to other COPLAC institutions (which ranged from 7 to 40 majors for each full time faculty). Even CSU Channel Islands (66:1) and San Francisco State University (28:1) report lower ratios. The addition of a new assistant professor in cognitive psychology will improve our numbers, but still leave us far behind other relevant programs and departments.

This has resulted in multiple curricular issues for the department, including the discontinuation of a Psychology minor as well as the Master’s in Depth Psychology program. In addition, the part-time lecturer faculty (16) currently outnumber tenure track faculty by a 2:1 ratio and teach the majority of classes in the department. Although the department has hired a Cognitive faculty member to begin in Fall 2024, , the Psychology department still has hiring needs in a number of areas (including another hire in the cognitive/physiological area). For example, the clinical/counseling area only has two full time faculty members with relevant expertise, even though a majority of the respondents to the senior exit survey express an interest in applying to graduate programs in clinical/counseling. The Psychology department is an important feeder program into SSU’s Masters in Counseling program – for example, 5 out of the 24 students from the Counseling department’s entering class in 2022 were SSU undergraduate students.

The addition of full-time faculty members ensures proper coverage of the psychology discipline at class sizes appropriate to department student learning outcomes and pedagogical requirements, and insures a feasible student-faculty advising ratio in the major. More full time faculty members also ensure more opportunities for psychology majors to become involved in research projects, community service, and other university affiliated activities that are outside the scope of part time instructors’ contracts. More full time faculty members also mean that faculty with relevant expertise can contribute to university wide curricular programs for first and second year students, and other forms of university service (e.g., committee chairs, service learning and teaching center fellowships, human resource consultants).

**7.4.2. Review Major Impaction Criteria**

In 2014, the program review recommended that the Psychology department decrease major and minor enrollment, and noted that the 3.0 minimum GPA admissions criterion had not been effective in decreasing major numbers. In 2019, the department closed the Psychology minor, but lowered the impaction criteria for the major to 2.8 due to declining SSU enrollment. This resulted in the number of Psychology majors remaining relatively steady over time, the only major at SSU for which this is the case. Unfortunately, this means that the student:faculty ratio in Psychology remains untenably high.

The faculty would like to increase minimum GPA criteria back to 3.0, as well as explore other ways to decrease Psychology major enrollment if additional faculty hires are not forthcoming. It also will be useful to get access to the data needed to determine whether students who entered the department with GPAs just below the 3.0 cut-off report similar success compared to students who entered the department with GPAs just above the 3.0 cutoff. Not only will these data inform impaction criteria choices, it will help faculty learn more about different groups of students’ experiences.

**3.4.2.1. Improve the Undergraduate Curriculum**

**3.4.2.1.1. Identify where majors meet student learning outcomes.**

As illustrated by the department curricular map, faculty did not identify many courses in the five breadth areas in which students demonstrate department program learning outcomes. Some students could demonstrate evidence for the research methods learning outcome with the *Psy 445, Advanced Research Design & Analysis* course included in the elective category, but unfortunately, that course has been discontinued. A new *Psychology of Diversity* course requirement could ensure that all psychology majors meet the diversity-related program learning outcomes.

One option is to integrate the demonstration of program learning outcomes into the Psy 490 upper division seminars offered in each breadth area. Senior seminars and capstone courses are a best practice for undergraduate engagement and retention (<https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/high-impact>). Senior seminars could even cover CSU writing enhanced curriculum (WEC) requirements and methods by assigning a traditional APA empirical paper (with empirical evidence defined inclusively from transcript analysis to meta-analysis). However, in order to ensure that these seminars offer enough seats for majors, the department will need to revisit the number of individual courses that it offers.

A second option is to adopt the recommendation made by the 2014 Program Reviewer that developmental psychology courses be folded into the social/personality breadth area. However, it might be more appropriate to combine the developmental and holistic breadth areas, especially if we define “holistic” using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory. A third option is to redistribute the holistic breadth category courses across the other four subdiscipline breath categories, perhaps based on the instructor’s home subdiscipline. For example, Dr. Brassington teaches Health Psychology, a course that can be moved to the Clinical Breadth area. The reduction of five breadth categories to four would streamline advising, increase the clarity of the breadth area requirement, and enable the department to offer fewer courses (and therefore, enable the possibility of a diversity course requirement).

Another path forward is to identify four consistently-offerable courses that represent the breadth areas (e.g., Social Psychology for the Social Psychology/Personality Breadth Area, Lifespan Development for the Development Breadth area). These four courses would constitute the core curriculum. This core curriculum would be invariant and constitute the reliable structure of the major and the remaining classes could be electives (thereby preserving students’ choice). Not only would this approach streamline advising, it would offer the department clear places for direct assessment of the first department program learning outcome, “Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology and apply them to relevant contexts.”

**3.4.2.2. Review Psy 270, Psychology of Self-Discovery**

Currently, Psy 270 Psychology of Self-Discovery is the only course that Psychology majors must take at SSU. The Psychology department offers 3 to 4 sections of this course every semester, each taught by a different instructor. As such, it is important to develop a shared learning agreement for this course about how the course maps to the Psychology department’s learning outcomes, as well as how to directly assess this course. In addition, the Psychology department is currently considering shifting this course to an upper division course (perhaps Psy 300 or Psy 370). One proposal is to renumber the Psychology of Self-Discovery course because this unique course is only offered at SSU, and the upper division number will give transfer students confidence that they are taking an upper division course that they could not take earlier in their college career. It also could be worth offering this course as a WEC (Writing Enhanced Course), given that it is the only course all psychology majors take at SSU. However, it will be important that psychology faculty agree about what type of writing (and how much writing) should be included in the course.

1. **Conclusion**

The psychology department at Sonoma State University is a popular program that has maintained steady enrollment, even in the face of budget cuts and overall enrollment declines for the university. Since 2014, the department has revamped its curriculum to offer students an easier path to graduation, as well as increased its focus on diversity. Its humanistic roots and classes focused on well-being make it a unique program which is well suited to continued growth in the current climate.

However, the department must solve two critical problems in order to provide SSU psychology majors with the undergraduate program that they deserve. First, it must match the number of students to available resources. This requirement means more full time faculty, fewer majors, or some combination of both. Second, the undergraduate curriculum must be revised in order to ensure that SSU psychology majors have access to 1) the same preparation that psychology majors at peer institutions do, and 2) the same experiences that SSU students in other majors and programs do. Increased support for faculty hires would allow us to build on our strengths in diversity/multiculturalism and experiential learning/science of well-being by integrating increased opportunities for undergraduate research, as well as graduate school and career preparation.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1. Department Information Over Time

Appendix 2. SSU Psychology Major 120 Unit “Road map”

Appendix 3. List of Department Courses by Category

Appendix 4. Department Curricular Map

Appendix 5. Department Senior Exit Survey

Appendix 6. Folder with Full Time Faculty Curriculum Vitae (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-7Bp06K50EAZ7fPgcon3ePhK7ppoopkw?usp=drive_link>)

Appendix 7. SSU Psychology Major Demographic Characteristics Over Time

Appendix 8. List of D,F and Withdrawal Rates by Course  
Appendix 9. SSU Psychology Major Persistence and Graduation Rates Over Time

1. We would like to thank Casey Herriot and Melinda Milligan for all their help with collecting needed data. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Velasquez-Andrade, E., Mellow, D., Fuentes, M., Gutierrez, A., & Butt, M. (2023). *Speed Diversity Dialogue: A Model for Fostering Multicultural Excellence.* (Manuscript in preparation). Department of Psychology, Sonoma State University. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Psychology was one of two School of Social Sciences programs identified as programs for growth by the 2023 Academic Master Plan New and Current Programs report (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\_DhFoMzUdCx-lzq4gNPeORy5fnxfc\_jH/view?usp=sharing). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Boniwell, I. (2012). Positive Psychology in a Nutshell: The Science of Happiness. United Kingdom: McGraw Hill Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As part of the recent GE revision, approved GE courses include a signature assignment that the university can collect for direct assessment of GE learning outcomes. Both Psy 250 and Psy 325 are approved courses, but have not been included in the university wide direct assessment. In the future, when these signature assignments are collected from instructors, we hope that they will be shared with us for direct assessment of department learning outcomes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gomes, M. E., Kime, L., Bush, J. M., & Myers, A. B. (2021). The electronic media fast and student well-being: An exercise in transformational teaching. *Teaching of Psychology*, *48*(4), 351–357. <https://doi-org.sonoma.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0098628320965260> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Martinez, A.G., Ni, H. W. & Smith, H.J. (October 14, 2022). *Revolution in the classroom? A pilot assessment of a diversity course using a randomized experiment.* CSU Redesigning Our Majors Symposium.  [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Note that overall SSU undergraduate persistence and retention rates include SSU psychology majors – the largest group of single department students represented in this population. Therefore, the department-university comparisons likely underestimate the difference between department and university persistence and retention rates. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)