

Department of Psychology Assessment Update 2009

Since Spring 2001, the Psychology Department has conducted an annual exit survey of graduating seniors as one tool for evaluating the undergraduate program and student learning in it. The first generation of this strategy initially began with an online administration using WebCT; the successful outcome was featured at a University Assessment Council presentation on assessment and technology. When the UW System implemented Learn@UW in 2004, the department transferred the instrument to that environment, and since then, it has typically had a response rate of greater than 50% from graduating seniors. Evaluation of these data for the past three years highlighted three key areas of student development requiring our attention. In response to the student feedback, the department made adjustments.

First, students had identified a lack of advising support as limiting their academic development. In response, the department identified several criteria crucial for effective advising. These criteria guided the search for new undergraduate advisor who could support students in learning about the major and as well as provide programmatic changes to the department's advising services to would enhance our undergraduates' understanding of the field of psychology and post-graduation opportunities (e.g., through graduate school and career workshops, guest speakers, Psych e-letters). With an increase in the advising appointment (100% to 120%), students have reported an impressive increase in satisfaction with the advising program.

Second, students identified limited opportunities to learn in more applied settings (and thereby participate fully in the Wisconsin Idea). Over the past two years, the department has created new opportunities for student to participate in service learning in two ways: by renewing one course (Psychology 412, Field Placement in Psychology) and increasing access in another (Psychology 399 Service Learning in Psychology).

Lastly, students had criticized the grading practices of Psychology 225, which satisfies the University Communication B requirement. Specifically, students argued that grading of papers had focused too much on formatting issues at the expense of fully evaluating the quality of their ideas. Given that the goal of this course is to foster critical thinking and effective communication, the faculty concurred with the students' assessment. In response, a team of faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants worked to modify grading practices to reflect a focus on the critical aspects our pedagogical goals.

The senior exit survey continues to be a valuable method for evaluating the undergraduate program.