External Review Committee Report

Comprehensive Program Review
Bachelor of Science in Psychology
Bachelor of Art in Psychology
Columbus State University
Submitted:

I. Introduction

A. Membership of Outside Committee

- Dr. Glenn D. Stokes, Campus Representative
  Professor of Biology
  Department of Biology
  Columbus State University
  Columbus, GA

- Dr. Kimberly Shaw, Campus Representative
  Associate Professor of Physics
  Department of Earth and Space Sciences
  Director of the Math and Science Learning Center
  Columbus State University
  Columbus, GA

- Dr. H. Lee Gillis, External Reviewer
  Professor of Psychology
  Chair of the Department of Psychology
  Georgia College and State University
  Milledgeville, GA

B. Procedure Followed and Information Gathered:

In advance of the meeting the Committee was provided with documentation in support of the Department of Psychology's self assessment. Said documentation included an Executive Summary prepared by the department chair, Mark Schmidt; a detailed Program Self Study; copies of full-time and part-time faculty curriculum vitae; the results of the 2008-2009 Program Major Field Assessment Report; a copy of the PSYCDATA 2010 survey instrument they administered to their students; and a Program Review prepared by an external consultant, Dr. Thomas P. Pusateri of Kennesaw State University. The

program self-study report documented the program's overall goals, curriculum reviews, learning outcomes, program improvement plans, enrollment figures, quantitative measures of productivity, quality and diversity figures and self-study performance indicators. The Committee had onsite, in person meetings between the morning of December 2, 2010 and noon on December 3, 2010. During that period the Committee toured the administrative, teaching and lab areas dedicated to the program. In addition the Committee had separate, hour long meetings with the department chair, the faculty, and four students who were majoring in Psychology. The students were all in their junior or senior years and were a mix transfer students and students who had been at CSU for their entire academic careers.

II. Findings of the External Review Committee

a. Summary Findings of Program's Overall Quality

The Committee's overall evaluation of the quality of the programs in Psychology is well above average. In each area of evaluation within this section the assessments were either "above average" or "very strong".

The Committee found the quality of the faculty to be excellent and committed to the success of their program and students. All full-time faculty hold terminal degrees appropriate to the teaching loads and, considering the relatively small size of their faculty, they cover most of the various sub-disciplines within psychology. Although there are limitations associated with the assessment of teaching there seems to be general agreement among the students that the faculty are doing an excellent job in the classroom. The students are appreciative of the advising they receive but expressed concern about the time faculty have available to meet with them individually. The latter was not a surprise considering there are over 300 majors and only five faculty advisors.

Student professional productivity is excellent and much of the faculty efforts in the area of research are associated with student projects. Many of their students make presentations at professional meetings and have earned awards as a result. The faculty as a whole also has made efforts to present their research at meetings. If there is an area where the faculty are not achieving at desired levels it would be in the number of peer reviewed publications.

The Committee spent a good bit of time in the review of the Psychology program degree requirements. We are unsure of the purpose of maintaining two separate degree programs that differ only in a few courses in the core. We also made note of the comparatively large number of required psychology courses in the upper-division. It appears to be disproportionately large compared to programs at sister and comparator institutions. In spite of the large number of required courses the high number of elective courses within the upper division could allow students to construct a degree that avoided whole sub-disciplines within the major. Student achievement is very good as indicated by their success on the nationally standardized Major Field Test they take but the results also indicate distinct pockets of weakness that could be the result of the program format.

- **Quality of Faculty**

  All five full time faculty members have terminal degrees in their field of study and all teach within their qualified areas. There is diversity within the faculty regarding their experience at Columbus State including faculty who have been there since 1997 to faculty who came to CSU in 2007. One of the current faculty members is a full time temporary appointment, filling a faculty line left vacant due to a resignation during the summer. The department is currently searching to fill this line full time with a developmental psychologist. Including part-time faculty members there is also diversity in gender with four males and four females.

  There are not enough faculty for the number of majors in the department compared with other schools within the system. At least two new faculty lines are needed for the department to be able to offer the depth and breadth of courses within the major in a timely fashion to allow adequate progression and graduation rates.

- **Quality of Teaching**

  Data about departmental advising was collected from graduating seniors in the PSYCDATA senior exit survey. Advising within the department appears to be well regarded by psychology majors. However, this is an advising load of approximately 300 majors, distributed over 5 full time faculty lines. In these circumstances, there are often long waits to meet with advisors, and it becomes more challenging for faculty advisors to advise on anything other than the courses needed for the upcoming semester. Creating additional faculty lines should allow this advising burden to be distributed over a larger number of faculty, allowing students a better chance to discuss long term plans for course taking, career planning, and professional concerns.

  In the departmental self-study, the psychology department provided instructor evaluation data. However, the data were provided in summary, over two years worth of courses, for all instructors, in a single summary table. Additionally, all of the evaluation data were those collected via Digital Measures, which means that the return rates were much lower than paper and pencil evaluation data collected in previous years. The limitations in the data presented in the self-study mean that, while the evaluation data provide a very positive picture of teaching evaluations in psychology, it is difficult to determine if this is due to strong teaching across the board, or whether there are outliers on the positive and/or negative end of this spectrum. We would recommend that the psychology department consider developing additional measures to evaluate teaching, which may include such things as peer observation, use of the Student Assessment of Learning Gains, or use of standardized pre- and post-tests to evaluate student learning in a class.

- **Quality of Research and Scholarship**

  One of the strengths of the program are the sheer number of presentations at professional conferences (beyond CSU) that are conducted with students. Not only does the Self Study document the commitment to and involvement with students in research, but just walking through the psychology department allows any observer to see a diversity of topics as well as the number of students and faculty involved. The department values research courses and this value is realized in the importance placed on individual and group research projects.

Given the amount of research conducted in both required and elective courses plus the number of presentations mentioned above, it is surprising that there were not more peer-reviewed publications from the faculty. An examination of the teaching load could easily be used as an explanation of why this may be the case – there may simply not be enough time for faculty to write up their presentations into publishable formats. Granted, the current production of peer reviewed papers is only slightly below par with peer institutions within the USG, but with the emphasis placed on student research, the output could be greater if faculty were given time to write.

- **Quality of Service**

  It is clear from the presentation of data in the Self Study document that the full-time faculty in the Department of Psychology are committed to serving the university at all levels. There is evidence of faculty service on University-wide committees and College committees that have significantly contributed to the operation and development of the University. All members of the faculty have also presented evidence that they are committed to the continuing health of their department through contributions to its administrative operation. It is also noted that the service obligation seems to be distributed fairly equally among the members of the Department. That is, no one member is accepting an unusually high share of the service commitment. The community has also benefited from the contributions of professional expertise through presentations, committee membership and participation in public school activities.

  If there is an area that could be further developed it would be in service contributions to the profession. There is evidence presented that some faculty are involved in manuscript and book reviews but little in the area of active participation with professional organizations at the regional or national level.

- **Quality of Faculty and Student Achievements**

  The Self Study provides documentation that students and faculty are active in research-related achievements, namely presentation of research. Further, the Self Study documents awards won by faculty, and some honors earned by students in recent years. In these areas, the department of psychology is certainly performing admirably.

  However, the Self Study does not document well the achievements of program graduates, namely by tracking the number of students that enroll in graduate programs (and where they enroll), those who become licensed or certified in the professions, etc. Because an accurate count is unavailable, it is difficult to know the longer term impact of the program of study on psychology graduates. We recommend that the department determine strategies to better track the progress of their graduates, in order to better determine what will best serve their current students.

- **Quality of Curriculum**

  The data provided in the Self Study document to support the quality of the curriculum relies on a self-report instrument given to students (PSYCDATA) and two recent years worth of the Major Field Test (MFT) in Psychology – a nationally standardized multiple choice test supplied by Educational Testing service. All indicators provided from students are positive about the curriculum and nearly all indicators on the MFT are above the 50th percentile.

The external consultant made recommendations that the department seriously consider whether the Bachelors of Arts program should be continued given that it differed very little from the Bachelors of Science program (foreign language being the difference). The number of students in the BA program would justify eliminating this as a program option.

More importantly, given the number of hours required of psychology majors (43) and the structure of the curriculum, serious consideration should be given to the consultant's recommendation that the department create a curriculum map that examined how learning outcomes related to specific courses offered.

From interviewing both students and faculty, it appeared that the current combination of required and elective courses resulted in students waiting until the end of their senior year to take courses perceived as "harder" resulting in "pinch points' for these courses filling with students who had non-productive grades and not being available to students who needed the course to progress toward graduation.

In addition, we talked with students who were able to take higher level courses (e.g., History and Systems) after only taking introductory psychology as these were the only courses available to them. Students also were able to avoid some courses considered essential to the core of psychology (as noted by the consultant) due to the choices provided in the current curriculum. Using a curriculum map and data from peer institutions might allow the department to justify streamlining the major to include required courses early in the major as prerequisites to those taken later in the major and eliminating some of the elective choices to increase exposure to all courses the faculty feel are at the core of psychological science.

- **Quality of Facilities and Equipment**

  The material provided in Self Study document, a tour of the department, and conversations with faculty demonstrated that classrooms and laboratory space was available and adequate for the current number of faculty. Maintenance of the equipment and updating software for research are ongoing needs of any department with the current facilities.

  As faculty are added to the department, laboratory space and equipment may become an issue if faculty specialty areas require such.

b. Recommendations for Improving the Quality

It is the Committees assessment that many of the identified shortcomings could be remedied by necessary growth in the size of the faculty. Although the program has grown consistently in enrollment the size of the faculty has remain constant. More faculty members would reduce the overwhelming advising burden, provide better access to courses in the major and provide for some release for faculty to become more involved in professional development and research productivity (as measured by the number of publications).

In the spring of 2010 the program invited Dr. Thomas Pusateri as a consultant to assess the current Columbus State University program in Psychology and make specific recommendations for improvement. The Committee found the report to be very thorough

and reflective of our own assessment and recommendations. We encourage the department to do a thorough review of that document and implement those recommendations that are clearly within their current budget capabilities and construct a strategic plan to meet the others.

c. Summary Findings of Program's Overall Productivity

If we assess a programs productivity based solely on the efficiency of its credit hour generation, that is the number of hours generated per dollar spent in the program, then the Department of Psychology is doing an excellent job. Their cost of operation by that standard is 30% lower than the average for the other University programs. Their high-enrollment core courses and the paucity of courses taught by adjuncts are major contributors to that success but there is a cost. High faculty demands to cover core and majors courses limits the number of different sections of classes they can offer and restricts faculty efforts in other areas of professional endeavor.

In terms of students declaring to be majors in one of the two majors offered they have experienced a 48% growth over the last four years. Having two nearly identical degree programs reduces the apparent growth impact on either. The one-year retention rate of the program is in line with the rates reported by other programs at the university but has experienced a decline over the past few years. The department reports of 5-year average of numbers of graduates is 23 students graduating per year for both degrees combined. This represents a 6-year graduation rate of approximately 30%. The number of graduates places the department fourth among the 10 departments in their college and eighth among the ten programs in the University System. Although eight in the System if we calculate a "graduation efficiency", that is graduates per faculty FTE, then CSU department falls in the middle of the pack.

The Department uses a single major fields assessment test to measure student learning outcomes. It covers the six assessment indicators identified in the learning outcomes of the two degrees. Overall, those students taking the test perform well and around the 50% percentile of all students taking the test. This Committee is a little concerned though with the drop in performance in two of the six indicators between the first and second years of assessment. Although a definitive cause cannot be identified there is strong indication that it may be due to students abilities to complete the degree programs avoiding exposure to one or more of the critical indicators identified. The flexibility that a large number of elective options in the upper-division courses of the program can also create gaps in student learning.

- **Enrollment in Program for the Past 5 Years**

    Total enrollments, according to data in the Self Study, have risen from a low of 194 in the 2006-07 academic years, to a high at the beginning of Fall 2010 of 288. These enrollment numbers are particularly strong, given the small number of faculty and the restrictions that this places on the department's abilities to offer upper level psychology elective courses or required courses.

    However, a small fraction of these students are enrolled in the BA program instead of the BS program. With the exception of foreign language requirements for the BA, or science requirements for the BS, these programs are identical. In order, therefore, to streamline offerings, we concur with the consultant's recommendation that the BA be phased out.

- **Degrees Awarded Over the Past 5 Years**

  The Self-Study reports a 5 year average number of graduates as 23 per year. While this is a viable program, it is clear from discussions with faculty and students that several required courses are not offered frequently enough to accommodate student demand. The addition of at least two faculty lines will allow the psychology department to offer more seats in these required courses, potentially permitting an increase in the graduation rates of their majors.

- **Comparison with CSU and USG Programs**

  The Department reports a 5-year average of 23 students graduating with BS and BA degrees in Psychology. Among departments in the College of Letters and Sciences (there are 10 departments) they are fourth in degree production and third in total number of majors. Among the 10 institutions in the University System for which we have data the program at CSU can be ranked eighth in production of graduates over the five years of review. An identified stumbling block to increased progression and graduation are courses that pose bottlenecks in the program. Required classes that included a lab are limited in the number of students enrolled by laboratory space and safety issues. Increasing the number of lab sections to increase course enrollments is prohibitive based on the increase in staff needed to cover the additional labs.

  A quick analysis of the productivity efficiency within the system reveals another view of the comparison. If you assess the number of graduates from a program per full-time faculty member you get an indication of the program degree production efficiency. Based on the reported 5-year averages the program at CSU has a productivity rate of approximately four graduates per faculty FTE per year. Within the system the same calculation reveals rates between a low of two to a high of 11. Most programs fall between four and seven. On that basis CSU's program is close to the mean productivity rate.

  Although the program seems to be near its productivity capacity based on the number of full-time faculty there appears to be room for improvement in terms of retention and graduation. Raising the calculated efficiency to seven graduates per full-time faculty member we could expect the average graduation number to increase from 23 to 35.

- **Program Retention Rate**

  Retention rates are reported as the percentage of first-time, full-time undergraduate students enrolled in the major who had entered CSU in the previous year. This measure is an externally determined standard for retention rates, and so is reported here. Retention rates for this program appear to have dropped over the past three years, but still remain strong at over 60% retention.   These retention rates are in line with, or better than, retention rates for CSU as a whole.

- **Student Learning Indicators**

  As indicated earlier, much of the information provided for the curriculum and subsequent performance by students in this curriculum was self report information from a student survey, and the nationally normed Major Field Test (MFT) in psychology.

From the self report data, most students indicated they have learned the necessary knowledge and skills required of undergraduates in psychology. The MFT, given for the past two years, given on a voluntary basis the first year, to those student graduating, indicates that all assessment indicators are above the 50th percentile the first year and five of six assessment indicators are above the 50th percentile in the second year. Of concern was that four of the six indicators had decreased from year 1 to year 2 as more students took the test. As reported earlier, given that students could "elect" not to take some courses considered to be part of the core of psychology (e.g., social psychology) the department should keep a close eye on what courses students take and how they perform on this nationally normed test.

In addition, since the MFT is one of the only direct measure of student learning, the department should strongly consider the consultant's advice to add additional direct measures of the curriculum including formative and summative assessments as indicated in the Assessment CyberGuide for Learning Goals and Outcomes in the Undergraduate Psychology Major .

- **Graduation Rate of Program**

  According to data in the self-study, six-year graduation rates for the last three cohorts vary from 20 – 38%. These six year graduation rates are in line with those reported in the CSU factbook for the university as a whole. Given the pinch points in the upper level curriculum, and the large number of majors required to perform research with faculty, this again supports the case to add additional full time faculty to the psychology program.

- **Cost Effectiveness of Instructional Delivery**

  Looking at the 5-year trend presented in the Self-Study the Department of Psychology generates credit hours at a cost that is approximately 30% lower than the campus as a whole. This can be attributed to the large number of students who have declared Psychology as a major and the very high productivity of the core service courses. Other contributing factors are their very limited use of adjunct faculty and the moderately large (60 students per section) size of their core courses. Even their online courses in the core have the same enrollments which distinguishes them from other programs that reduces enrollment caps in their online sections.

  This efficiency comes at a cost. With a growing population of majors, a growing demand in the core (online and in person) and a reduction of the part-time faculty budget the burden is placed on the full-time faculty to meet the growing demand. The penalty is paid in decreased availability of seats in majors classes and a decrease in faculty productivity in the other areas of performance review. It is clear to this committee that there is an easily justifiable argument to increase the number of full-time faculty members in this program.

d. Recommendations for Improving Program Productivity

In order to improve overall productivity in the program as measured by numbers of majors and graduates there must be growth in the number of members of the faculty. Bottlenecks in required courses and the infrequency of offering courses in the upper-division challenges students to finish the degree in a timely fashion. In addition, the faculty are committed to engaging the students in the learning process through the high percentage of classes with

associated labs and through the requirement of independent student research. Limits on number of students that can be accommodated in labs and in individual research restricts the size of each cohort of students in each class. A larger faculty would be needed to offer multiple sections of these required classes.

Again, it is important for the department to do a comprehensive review of the report provided by the consultant. Every finding of this committee is reflected in that report and many of the recommendations will mirror our own. Among those is the recommendation that the Department seriously assess the need for two, virtually identical degree programs which split their current majors. They should also construct a curriculum map and assess possible paths to degree completion. The intent of the curriculum mapping exercise should be to assure students exposure to all curricular areas identified as critical to the program.

e. Assessment of Program Viability

- **Summary Findings of Program's Overall Viability**

    By most measures and supported by the documentation provided in the Self-Study Report the psychology program at Columbus State University is quite viable. The program ranks among the top 10% in numbers of majors among all programs on campus and compares favorably with other programs in the State. In addition, recent trends indicate a likely growth. They show retention and graduation rates consistent with the University as a whole and the student learning outcomes assessments indicate success commensurate with national averages. They do provide some evidence of student satisfaction with the program but have little evidence of the success and ultimate career successes of their graduates. The Committee judges the overall quality of the program to be well above average and judge that it will remain competitive in student recruitment both on and off campus.

    Limitations to the potential success and growth of the program were also recognized. Limits in the numbers of students that can be enrolled in major's classes and the number of sections of those courses are creating a bottleneck for normal matriculation through the degree program. There appears to be sufficient monetary, equipment and space resources to accommodate some growth in the program but the size of the faculty creates a measurable impediment to that growth. Another consequence of this is the encroachment of time spent on teaching a larger population of majors and a greater number of courses on the faculty's professional opportunities. As a result, the professional productivity of the faculty outside of the classroom is being impacted.

- **Summary Findings of Program's Improvement Plans**

    It has become clear that many of the shortcomings identified in the program and the limitations to their future success can be linked to insufficient staffing. That's not to say that growth of the faculty ranks will not have a significant impact on the quality size and success of the program. It will. But there are other efforts that can and should be undertaken even with the current resources.

    The faculty should begin an immediate and thorough review of the program assessment prepared by Dr. Pusateri. In addition to outlining many of the issues identified in this document he makes specific recommendations for implementable programs that would address them. The faculty should begin an immediate assessment of the program

structure and determine whether or not it is constructed in such a way that students are guaranteed to be exposed to of areas of learning that are deemed essential and that are assessed. Towards that end there should be an investigation into alternate tools to measure student learning outcomes and learning success. Also, an effort needs to be made to track graduates of the program to determine whether the program provided them with the academic background to be successful in their chose fields. The stated goal of the program is, "prepares students for graduate study in psychology and related fields and for other careers requiring a baccalaureate degree." To our knowledge there is no mechanism in place to track students after graduate or assessment of the relative success of this goal.

The psychology program at Columbus State University is, in overall assess, very strong and popular with its students. With the exception of needing a significant infusion of funds for faculty lines most other improvements can be addressed with resources, personnel and information already on hand. The faculty is already actively addressing many of these issues and with appropriate administrative support there is the promise of developing an even stronger and successful program.