

**Undergraduate Program Assessment Annual Report**  
**Academic Year 2009-2010**  
**Department of Psychology**

**I. Program Mission**

The vision for the Undergraduate Psychology Program at Marshall University is for students and other community stakeholders to understand how human physiology, development, cognition, and affect, influence human relationships and behavior. Our mission is to educate students about psychologists' use of scientific principles to understand, predict, and influence behavior by studying the underlying mechanisms that guide human behavior and interaction.

**II. Student Learning Outcomes in Psychology**

The Department of Psychology at Marshall University models its student learning outcomes after the American Psychological Association's (APA's) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major.<sup>1</sup> The APA's learning goals fall under two main categories: (1) Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent with the Science and Application of Psychology (Goals 1-5); and (2) Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent with Liberal Arts Education that Are Further Developed in Psychology (Goals 6-10). The goals set forth by the APA are:

**Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology**

Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.

**Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology**

Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.

**Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology**

Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, scientific approach to solve problems to behavior and mental processes.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.pdf>

**Goal 4: Application of Psychology**

Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.

**Goal 5: Values in Psychology**

Students will weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a scientific discipline.

**Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy**

Students will demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes.

**Goal 7: Communication Skills**

Students will communicate effectively in a variety of formats.

**Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness**

Students will recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity.

**Goal 9: Personal Development**

Students will develop insight into one's own and others' behavior and mental processes and apply effective strategies for self-management and self-improvement.

**Goal 10: Career Planning and Development**

Students will pursue realistic ideas about how to implement their psychological knowledge, skills, and values in occupational in a variety of settings.

**III. Assessment Activities**

During the previous academic year, the Department of Psychology focused on assessing Goal 2 (Research Methods in Psychology), Goal 3 (Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology), and Goal 7 (Communications Skills).

**(A) Assessment Measures.** For this year's report, we are using data from student presentations. These are student-generated posters that have been presented at local and national conferences, sometimes intended for small, local audiences, such as the College of Liberal Arts conference, Sigma Xi, or the Tri-State Psychology Conference, and sometimes intended for larger, more discipline-specific conferences, such as APA's regional

conferences (e.g., Eastern Psychological Association) and divisional association meetings (e.g., Society for Personality and Social Psychology). We adapted a rubric from Herdegen (2004)<sup>2</sup> in order to complete this assessment.

Rating	Meaning
<b>Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology</b>	
<i>Research Question</i>	
5	Clearly defined variables: IV/DV, specific statement of experimental manipulation or measurement of variables. Stated in the form of a question.
4	Clearly defined variables: IV/DV, general statement of experimental manipulation or measurement of variables. Stated in the form of a question.
3	Clearly defined variables: IV/DV, no statement of experimental manipulation or measurement of variables, or not stated in the form of a question.
2	Clearly defined variables: IV/DV, no statement of experimental manipulation or measurement of variables and not stated in the form of a question.
1	No clear definition of variables: IV/DV, no statement of experimental manipulation or measurement of variables, and not stated in the form of a question.
<i>Method</i>	
5	Contains effective, quantifiable, concisely organized information necessary for replication, written so that all information elsewhere in document relates back to this section, identifies all sources of data to be collected, identifies sequential information in appropriate chronology. Description of procedures is thorough but not redundant.
4	As in 5, but contains superfluous information or wordy descriptions.
3	Presents a replicable study and all other information related to this section, but fails to identify some sources of data or presents sequential information in a disorganized or difficult way. May contain unnecessary or superfluous information.
2	Presents a study that is marginally replicable, parts of the basic design must be inferred by the reader. Procedures not quantitatively described.
1	Describes the study so poorly or in such a nonscientific way that it cannot be replicated.
<i>Research Design</i>	
5	Clearly defined variables: IV (levels specified)/DV, or non-experimental study, variables are clearly explained in terms of levels or measurement.
4	Variables identified: IV (levels specified)/DV, but either levels of IV missing, no DV, or missing explanation of how variables will be used/measured.
3	Variables identified: IV (levels specified)/DV, but two things missing (levels of IV missing, no DV, or missing explanation of how variables will be used/measured).

<sup>2</sup> Herdegen, R. T. III (2004) in P. L. Maki, *Assessing for Learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

2	One variable not identified at all.
1	No variables clearly identified and or statement of research design missing.
<i>Statistical Analysis Chosen</i>	
5	Statistical analysis is thorough and appropriate to the research question. Results are presented in a clear manner, appropriately interpreted.
4	Statistical analysis may not be thorough but is appropriate to the research question. Results are presented in a clear manner, appropriately interpreted.
3	Statistical analysis may not be thorough and may not be appropriate to the research question. Results are presented in a clear manner, and in general, appropriately interpreted.
2	Statistical analysis is not thorough and may not be appropriate to the research question. Results are presented in an unclear manner, and may not be appropriately interpreted.
1	Analysis is inappropriate or grossly inadequate for the research question.
<b>Goal 3: Critical Thinking in Psychology</b>	
<i>Introduction: Literature Review</i>	
5	Articles reviewed are relevant to the problem under investigation; thorough coverage of previous studies; issues are clearly explained and discussed in a logical order; number of articles cited is fully sufficient for overview.
4	Articles reviewed are relevant to the problem under investigation; coverage of previous studies may be incomplete; some confusion over issues, or not explained and discussed in a logical order; number of articles cited is insufficient for overview.
3	Some articles reviewed are not relevant to the problem under investigation; coverage of previous studies may be incomplete; some confusion over issues, or not explained and discussed in a logical order; number of articles cited is insufficient for overview.
2	Articles reviewed are not relevant to the problem under investigation; coverage of previous studies may be incomplete; some confusion over issues, or not explained and discussed in a logical order; number of articles cited is insufficient for overview.
1	Research and theory related to current problems is not reviewed or discussed.
<b>Goal 7: Communication Skills</b>	
<i>Writing Quality</i>	
5	Student has written elegantly and cogently, using proper grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling. Poster is neat and free of typographical errors. Wording is appropriate to the context. Paragraphs are well-constructed. Paper exhibits a logical flow from section to section. Student used proper voice for the paper.
4	As in 5, but occasional typographical errors or minor errors in spelling, grammar, syntax, or punctuation (does not detract from meaning). Wording is appropriate to the context. Paragraphs are well-constructed.
3	Numerous typographical errors and repeated errors in spelling, grammar, syntax, or punctuation. Student has not expressed ideas with clarity and precision. Transitions are awkward, wording is simplistic in

	style and content.
2	Student has displayed serious and consistent problems in basic writing skill. The ability to express ideas is compromised by poor writing quality.
1	Paper is seriously deficient in quality of writing.

**(B) Benchmarks.** The Department of Psychology would expect that mean ratings of 4 and above would indicate successful demonstration of the goals above.

**(C) Results/Analysis.** The following table presents the mean ratings (with standard deviations in parentheses) for each of the Goals presented in (A) above. These values are based on 15 poster presentations.

<b>Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology</b>	
<i>Research Question</i>	4.07 (1.03)
<i>Method</i>	4.13 (1.13)
<i>Research Design</i>	4.00 (1.00)
<i>Statistical Analysis Chosen</i>	4.15 (1.28); 2 missing values
<b>Goal 3: Critical Thinking in Psychology</b>	
<i>Introduction: Literature Review</i>	4.33 (0.98)
<b>Goal 7: Communication Skills</b>	
<i>Writing Quality</i>	4.33 (0.82)

**(D) Analysis/Planned Action.** For the presentations reviewed in this assessment report, the means were well within values that indicate satisfactory progress toward the APA’s identified goals. Furthermore, they represent a rather homogenous set of presentations, without a great deal of variation.

The lack of variation may be because the sample of posters was one of convenience: Most of the posters were for local or national presentations, and those presentations are subject to self-selection. That is, the students who opt to present at and go to local or national conferences do so because it will help them obtain particular goals, especially entering a graduate program in psychology. Thus, these results may not be representative of psychology majors generally, and therefore, assessment of these goals in the future should occur as part of the Experimental Psychology course (PSY 323), which would be the third of a required set of courses for psychology majors. Future assessment efforts should be directed at that course and at the capstone level, which would be more diverse (because they are required of all psychology majors) and which

may provide two separate opportunities to examine student performance early in their major (PSY 323) and later in their major (capstone).

**IV. Overview of Changes**

In previous years, the Department of Psychology has done assessment differently than the guidelines set forth by the Office of Assessment and Program Review. We previously assessed knowledge and were planning to examine changes in knowledge over time, but this approach assesses a more limited set of outcomes in a more limited manner than is required. As a result, we have changed our assessment approach and are developing a plan to assess all program goals in a 4-year cycle. Not all of these changes are in place as of this writing.

**V. Changes Due to Assessment Day Activities**

As a result of this year's assessment activities, we plan to work on an assessment plan that will incorporate assessment during Experimental Psychology and during the capstone experiences required of all majors. These changes will require significant buy-in from the faculty in the department.

The Department is also planning some Assessment Day activities that focus on student career plans, which is one of the APA goals that is not easily assessed under the revised assessment plan. Previous efforts at involving a large number of students on Assessment Day have been met with mixed success, and thus, more effort may need to be expended to persuade students that participating on Assessment Day is valuable for the improvement of their academic programs.

The Department will also have to use Assessment Day time to develop and plan future assessment activities that can be incorporated into other courses. Faculty may have better ideas about how to use materials or procedures they already have in place, which may provide a more complete picture of student performance.

**VI. Assistance Needed with Assessment**

No assistance is needed other than that identified above.