

Psychology Program Review

Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:
Dr. Jacqueline Nolte, Dean of the College of Arts

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Program and Unit Review: Psychology

Dean's Summary Report

Dr. Jacqueline Nolte

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The department of Psychology delivers an Honours in Psychology, a Major and an Extended Minor in the BA and a certificate in Extended Studies in Arts: Psychology Honours. Program content is currently delivered by eleven full time faculty members and a range of sessional instructors. Psychology has 70 sections taught by fulltime faculty and 57 sections in the part time budget.

In January 2015, the External Review Committee submitted their review of UFV's Department of Psychology, following on from a site visit that occurred in September 2014. The committee was comprised of two members from other Canadian universities and one internal member from another department.

The committee affirmed the academic credibility of all of the programs reviewed as well as the strong student-centred approach exhibited by Psychology faculty. There were also a number of recommendations embedded in the report. The summary of the report is worth quoting in full

“In summary, the committee found an institution and department in the midst of structural change from a Community College to a teaching intensive Regional University. This evolution has been taking place over several decades, but has reached a critical point. The committee noted much strength that the department brings to the table (e.g., strong teaching commitment and student-centred approach). Nevertheless, there remain structural, administrative, and resource concerns that impede the full participation of the department in the emerging role of UFV. Psychology is a vital component of the undergraduate and graduate programs of Arts and Science across North America. This component includes strong student interest as well as practical contributions to society. The department has the potential to be a cornerstone for the Regional University. The committee has reviewed these issues and, from an outside perspective, made a number of Departmental and Institutional recommendations. These recommendations are designed to curb some of the negative patterns that have emerged, strengthen the existing program, build on the strengths of the discipline, and improve overall faculty development in the discipline. The committee found a strong core discipline that can be made much stronger with some appropriate structural changes in curriculum and resource allocation, some much needed infrastructure support for the current core curriculum, and some developmental support for faculty and programs.”

A. Committee recommendations, department response and dean's summary of actions on: CURRICULUM

The committee commended the department on development of support for the Honours program; this has resulted in increased number of registrations in the Honours program. The committee also commended UFV on honorarium support for delivery of Directed Studies and Honours thesis supervision.

Recommendation: the department should conduct an annual review of the strengths and weaknesses of the Honours program.

Action: The department recognizes that conducting such a review annually will help maintain a healthy honours program as circumstances change. The department will keep track of the success of Honours students and the Dean's office will track enrolment and retention in this program on an annual basis with a view to identifying student and faculty satisfaction with the program.

Department members continue to feel that UFV could do more in the way of faculty compensation for the increasing numbers of Honours students. They disagreed with the reviewers' suggestion that the department divert resources by restructuring Psych 101 and 102 to allow for the creation of fourth year seminar courses and advanced research methods training for Honours and Major students. If the department wants to develop beyond its present service-profile toward greater emphasis on research opportunities for upper level students and opportunities for faculty wishing to engage in promoting undergrad research, it is the dean's belief that it needs consider the external reviewers' creative suggestions seriously. It is worth noting that flexible workload will allow for different annual workload plans in accordance with the financial plan of the unit and faculty. However, the former is a labour-relations discussion.

Recommendation: The Psychology department should review the Minors options in support of related disciplines to create greater options for non-majors in the discipline.

Action: The department is not sure if reducing the 19 lower-level credits required for the extended minor is feasible but it is willing to engage in exploratory discussions on this issue. The Associate Dean of Students will be asked to work with the department to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this Minor option.

The review committee had a number of recommendations regarding course structure that they considered in relation to resource allocation. These included:

Recommendation: that the department work within the existing contract to initiate larger classes in first-year Psychology.

Recommendation: that the department reduce written work in introductory classes so as to shift resources to upper level teaching

Recommendation: that the university pursue the option of undergraduate teaching assistants to support delivery of introductory courses and allow allocation of more faculty time to support more advanced courses

The committee noted that the program and faculty workloads are heavily stacked on the first year, leaving less breadth and options at the upper year levels. Freed up resources could be diverted into pre-counselling courses, fourth-year seminars, and the teaching of advanced research methods. They observed that the imbalance of resources devoted to lower levels in turn affected the length of time students were taking to graduate, on average seven years. On p.11 they state, "[a]lthough this timeframe might be reasonable for the commuter and part-time student, university status will increasingly promote more full-time students. Compared to 2008, 1000 more full-time students and 600

less part-time students are attending UFV. In any event, students should be able to complete the program in four years.” On p.12 they write, “[t]his service component of lower level Psychology courses is typical across many universities. What is not typical is the level of resources devoted to this role by Psychology at UFV.... Simply put, it is not the best use of Ph.D. trained Psychologists to edit grammar on written assignments for multiple sections of 30 first-year students. In Psychology programs, there are many majors and Honours students who require support in discipline-specific writing and research and opportunities for community practical experience. Given the distribution of Psychology students and their needs, more faculty resources should be apportioned to advanced courses and training opportunities and less to first year than is currently the case. It is worth noting that experience elsewhere has shown that this beneficial transition can occur without additional resources and without reduction in the quality of the first-year experience in Psychology.” On p.13 they continue, “the department should begin scheduling larger first-year classes by combining sections. Such strategies are already being employed by other departments at UFV.... It is important that the Faculty Dean supports departmental initiatives in this area with clearly defined the trade-offs and tangible increases in options for majors and Honours students.”

It is interesting to note that the committee commented on the viability of using undergraduate TAs, in turn preparing them for post-graduate opportunities and communication skills beneficial in many of the work opportunities pursued by Psychology graduates.

As evident in the department’s response, the department recognizes the logic of the external review committee’s recommendation to free up resources by combining multiple sections of PSYC 101 and/or PSYC 102 into single large sections. However, department members are loathe to give up small class sizes where students are better able to initiate one-to-one interactions with their instructors than occurs at big research universities. It is worth noting that no data is quoted to support the claim that student in these small classes are more successful than students in larger classes who go on to enjoy more research opportunities and course choice at upper levels. The members of the department expressed concern that savings obtained in this way would not go toward improving upper level offerings. The Dean can commit to this use of freed up resources if the department decides to double up sections and will work with the department on a financial model. Finally, the department members argue that classes in psychology that have no writing component may be sending students the wrong message about the importance of writing in our program.” The department could make entry into the program competitive – in fact entry requirements into the Psych program have been tightened up. It is the dean’s belief that first year classes should be writing intensive to support small class size *or* they could be increased in size to permit the recommendations of the reviewers.

Action: The dean will discuss with the department the reviewers’ recommendation to enhance the credibility of the program by offering a broader range of upper level courses and advanced research methods classes.

Recommendation: The Department should move forward with detailed planning for the introduction of the Applied Master’s in Counselling Psychology;

Recommendation: The Faculty and Graduate office should provide tangible support to the development of the Applied Master's in Counselling Psychology including faculty release time as needed, budget development, staffing plans, student demand and needs assessments, Ministry liaison, and other requirements to move forward to the degree approval process.

Action: The Dean met with the program working group that has now decided to delay the program development due to one member having decided to retire, another having gone on maternity leave and a vacant position that needs to be filled. The department has also requested a further hire before such a program concept is pursued. There is no budget for such a hire in the coming fiscal but this will be requested in the subsequent budget cycle.

Recommendation: The Institution should initiate a review of on-line and hybrid course delivery and establish a regular evaluation process that includes the method of delivery.

Action: The department is open to this as long as faculty members who offer those courses are an integral part of the review process. The dean's office will work with the department on this review process.

Recommendation: The department should review the effectiveness of the first-year statistics course relative to offering the course in second year in conjunction with the methods course.

Action: The department believes encouraging students to take their statistics course early in their program is highly effective.

Recommendation: The department should review the integration of the lecture and lab components of the second year methods course.

Action: the department is open to a re-examination of the integration of the two components of PSYC 202, especially in the light of student concerns raised in the review. Current instructors are not keen to undertake the burden of teaching a labour-intensive course as well as a review of it and are requesting some form of compensation. The dean will assess work hours involved.

Recommendation: The University should pursue changes in its waiting list policies to ensure that the maximum number of students is served.

Action: This is already being implemented by a scheduling and registration task force at the university level. The department head and the departmental assistant share a seat on this task force.

B. Committee recommendations, department response and dean's summary of actions on: HUMAN RESOURCES: STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation: The Faculty should take immediate steps to fill the vacant faculty position in Psychology with someone who can teach pre-counselling courses and support the development of the Master's in Counselling Psychology.

Action: The Dean has asked the department head to draft a posting in line with this recommendation and to share it with the department members for feedback before submitting to this office. The department will be asked to identify hiring priorities for a future hire.

Recommendation: The Faculty should consolidate resources to regularize the current part-time sessional lab instructor position.

Action: The dean has asked for an estimate of the number of hours required to assess the viability of this recommendation

Recommendation: The Faculty should provide resources to support the peer tutor system in Psychology.

Action: The department has recognized that the Academic Success Centre has assumed this role but it is currently piloting recruiting upper-level mentors to serve as leaders for student study groups in first year.

C. Committee recommendations, department response and dean's summary of actions on: FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation: The Institution should review and, where appropriate, implement changes in current processes, including appeals, for promotion, tenure, sabbatical leaves, and various sources of release time to ensure proper peer review and decision-making with due consideration to discipline-specific academic criteria.

Action: The Associate Dean of Faculty assists faculty in their application processes. The issue of appeals will be conveyed to the respective committees.

Recommendation: The Psychology department should develop a collegial system for mentoring new and existing faculty to support research and professional development.

Action: The department notes that there is a fairly small group of research-active faculty members who can be approached for help on an informal basis. With hiring of new faculty, formal mentorship can be considered.

D. Committee recommendations, department response and dean's summary of actions on: INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPACE

Recommendation: The Faculty and University should develop a plan to increase the available space and specialized equipment to support student-centred and on-site Psychological research and applications for majors and honours students.

Action: The department has three small rooms, which are also used for other functions such as tutoring and studying. When the 15 honours students all start running their studies in the winter, space could become tight and chronic if Honours numbers remain high. The department will be asked to submit a space planning package to be sent to Camus Planning through the Dean.

Recommendation: The department should explore ways to increase the number of labs, research opportunities, community outreach opportunities, and other experiential components available to students in the third and fourth years of the program.

Action: The department notes that neither students nor faculty receive credit for this. Students can receive co-curricular credit or the department could explore developing a research shell course for

students to attain credit. Tuition from such a course could in turn serve as compensation for faculty. Again, flexible workload might be a route toward such acknowledgement.

Recommendation: The department should develop a third year statistics course that incorporates the use of statistical packages such as SPSS or R and reduces reliance on calculators;

Recommendation: The Faculty should develop and implement a plan to enhance computer access and support for the instruction of statistics in Psychology.

Action: The department will discuss. The costs associated with introducing a lab component to PSYC 110, with software such as SPSS, will be explored but the Ministry tuition limit policy might prove a hurdle in relation to funding such labs. Upper level students can also be encouraged to make use of the Kipp lab.

Recommendation: The institution should initiate an academic review of the operation of Blackboard and other on-line resources to ensure they are being implemented in a manner that effectively supports the needs of students and instructors.

Action: The reviewer's recommendations will be conveyed to Teaching and Learning, along with the view held by members of the department that Blackboard as it is currently being used by UFV is not the optimal vehicle for obtaining these benefits.

E. Committee recommendations, department response and dean's summary of actions on:

DEPARTMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Recommendation: The institution, in consultation with the department, should introduce steps to ameliorate current conditions and develop a long-term plan to upgrade the departmental offices and research space on campus to be commensurate with the standards of teaching intensive universities.

Actions: UFV is operating at 117% beyond capacity. The Dean and Manager of Academic and Administrative Services will conduct a review of the office spaces of the Psychology department. Since the review, the department head has moved into an office with a window. The dean will work with the faculty to determine whether additional research space would be used were it provided.

Recommendation: The Department should introduce steps to encourage more on-campus presence and interaction with students.

Action: Department members argue that their enthusiasm for their students and program is expressed in ways "other than spending a lot of time in our offices". The dean will work with the head to envisage ways of supporting the student association and student culture along with an assessment of faculty office time and service commitments. The dean will ask the head to share ideas on building a collegial and respectful work environment