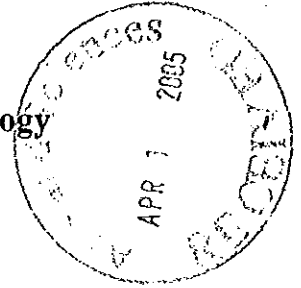


**External Reviewers' Report on the Department of Psychology
Indiana State University
March, 2005**



Introduction

William Addison, Chair of the Psychology Department at Eastern Illinois University, and Kimberly MacLin, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Northern Iowa, visited Indiana State University (ISU) February 21-22, 2005 for the purpose of reviewing the Department of Psychology. The visit was coordinated by Virgil Sheets, Interim Department Chair. Documentation provided to the reviewers prior to their visit included the Department's comprehensive self-study report, which included a variety of supplemental materials (e.g., abbreviated faculty vitae, personnel policies and procedures, course syllabi, handbook for undergraduate majors).

During our visit, we met with Virgil Sheets, Interim Department Chair; Jack Maynard, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Karen Schmid, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs; Diane Michelfelder, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Ann Rider, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; K. K. Bentil, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies; Michele Boyer, Chair of the Department of Counseling; Linda Maule, Interim Director of Women's Studies; Deb Worley, Acting General Education Coordinator; 11 faculty members from the Department; and separate groups of undergraduate students and graduate students enrolled in the general-experimental program.

Areas of Review

I. Curriculum

A. Undergraduate Curriculum/Advising

The undergraduate curriculum for the major provides exposure to the diverse array of areas represented in the curricula of most strong departments of psychology. There is a good mix of basic offerings in standard sub-fields and special topics offerings. The number of required credits (37) is consistent with the national average of 34, as reported by Perlman and McCann (1999) in an article published in *Teaching of Psychology* that described a catalog survey of 500 colleges.

The requirement of a "culminating experience" is particularly noteworthy, and this is also consistent with national trends in the discipline. A number of the faculty we interviewed emphasized the importance of the capstone requirement. The opportunity for students to meet this requirement by participating in field

- 4) Create a lower-level “introduction to the profession” course that would be a requirement for majors. Due to the liberal arts nature of undergraduate psychology, students who graduate with a psychology degree tend to pursue a wide variety of careers and graduate training options. A professional psychology course, designed to introduce majors to the field of psychology and to help students identify their career goals, can also serve to supplement the formal academic advising process, and to relieve the faculty from some of the more routine aspects of advising. Given the potential benefits for students and faculty, it is not surprising that this type of course is becoming a standard requirement in undergraduate psychology programs across the country. Currently, the Department offers PSY 384: Survey of Psychological Applications, which apparently serves this purpose to a degree, but it also serves as a prerequisite for PSY 484: Field Work in Psychology. The Department might consider creating a one-credit professional psychology course offered at the 200 level, and reducing the number of credits for PSY 384 to one or two.

Academic advising appears to be a strength of the Department. In a meeting of faculty from allied departments, it was pointed out that the Department of Psychology has been a leader in the assessment of the advising process, and that they have established a culture of student-centered advising. It is noteworthy that virtually all of the faculty participate in the advising process, even those who teach exclusively at the graduate level. Overall, we were favorably impressed by the fact that faculty seem to take their advising responsibilities very seriously, and that the focus of the process is clearly on meeting the needs of the students. This impression was supported by comments made by the students we interviewed, who indicated that they were pleased with the quality of academic advising.

B. Graduate Curriculum

The 32-hour curriculum for the Master’s degree program in general-experimental psychology provides students with a solid, research-oriented foundation in scientific psychology. As indicated on the Department’s website, the program is “designed primarily for students who wish to continue study for a doctorate degree in psychology’s many experimental fields.” With its emphasis on advanced course work in general-theoretical psychology, and opportunities for collaborative research, the current curriculum is clearly consistent with this goal.

The graduate students we interviewed indicated that they were pleased with the research opportunities available to them, and that the faculty’s support of their research activities gave them a feeling of “empowerment.” They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to teach in the undergraduate program, an experience that is likely to improve their chances of gaining admission to doctoral programs.

students' (and former students') attitudes regarding their satisfaction with various aspects of the program (see **Appendix A** for a sample exit survey). The Department could use this information in conjunction with their direct measures of student learning as part of a formal review of the program's relative strengths and weaknesses. To the credit of the Department, both of these recommendations are consistent with points made in the self-study report concerning areas for improvement in the assessment program.

B. Graduate Program in General-Experimental Psychology

Consistent with the goal of the program to prepare students for doctoral training in experimental psychology, the program emphasizes research in areas such as cognition, social psychology, and biospsychology. The relevant assessment measures consist primarily of two questionnaires, one that students complete during their first semester in the program ("First Year Master's Student Questionnaire"), and the other that is completed upon students' exit from the program ("Follow Up Questionnaire"). Although these are useful measures for gauging students' interest in, as well as their satisfaction with, various aspects of the program, they do not provide direct measures of student learning. Thus, we encourage the Department to discuss the development of several specific learning goals for these graduate students. As they do so, it would be useful to consider strategies for directly assessing these goals (e.g., a comprehensive exam).

Of greater concern is the relatively small number of students in the program. According to the self-study report, enrollment has remained stable at 2-4 students per year; currently, there is only one second-year student and three first-year students enrolled in the program. These low numbers are reflected in the fact that only 8 students in the last 12 years were admitted into doctoral programs. Apparently, many students who enter the program with the goal of attaining a doctoral degree decide not to do so when they leave the program, and they eventually obtain employment in research-oriented positions (e.g., assessment director, marketing researcher).

A related issue, identified in the self-study report, is the low level of funding available for graduate assistantships. The typical assistantship in the Department provides an annual stipend of approximately \$5000 per year, which is significantly less than what is offered in similar programs at comparable institutions. Given the relatively few number of assistantships available, and the small stipends provided to assistants, it is not surprising that qualified applicants frequently decline the offer of admission. For the graduate program to remain viable, we believe it is important for the Department to explore alternative sources of funding (e.g., external assistantships), and for the University to support the Department's efforts by increasing the stipends for graduate assistants.

the expertise of the faculty, and their dedication to quality teaching constitute one of the major strengths of the Department.

In his position as Interim Department Chair, Virgil Sheets is generally recognized by his colleagues as an effective leader who is supportive of the faculty and committed to the Department. A number of the faculty we interviewed pointed to his leadership as one of the principal strengths of the Department. The junior faculty in particular indicated that they appreciate his support and encouragement. Additionally, a number of faculty indicated that intra-departmental communication was open and democratic. Given the quality of leadership that he has demonstrated, we believe the Department would be well-served if Dr. Sheets were to be named as permanent chair.

In our view, the primary issue regarding personnel is the level of staffing in the Department. Considering the demands on the Department in terms of service to their majors, the graduate students, and those students in other programs who take psychology courses, the Department seems considerably understaffed. The approximate major-to-faculty ratio of 25:1 is substantially higher than that for departments of similar scope and mission (typically, about 20:1). Given the relatively heavy teaching load combined with student advising, expectations for scholarly activity, and demands for university service, it is not surprising that virtually all of the faculty we interviewed characterized themselves as hard-working. An additional faculty position would allow the Department to serve the students and the University more effectively, and would likely improve the morale of the faculty.

B. Support Staff

The Department has two secretaries, one full-time and one half-time, who provide clerical support, and an administrative assistant who handles travel authorizations and budgets, and oversees office staff. Additionally, the Department employs a full-time technician, a full-time secretary and clinic administrator, and a number of student workers. Our impression is that the Department is well-served in this area.

Strengths of the Department

The Department of Psychology at ISU is characterized by a considerable number of strengths, including the faculty, the leadership, the undergraduate advising program, and the research opportunities available to the general-experimental graduate students. Additionally, the Center for the Study of Health, Religion, and Spirituality is a distinctive feature of the Department, as is the undergraduate program's emphasis on experiential learning and community engagement. The clear consensus among the people we interviewed, including administrators, faculty, and students, was that as a group, the faculty are excellent teachers who take the education of their

they deem appropriate, in a more informal atmosphere than is typically achieved in a department meeting. Generally, department retreats are held away from campus on a day that allows for maximum participation. For example, the Department could reserve a room at a local restaurant for a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. Following a luncheon, the faculty could spend several hours in discussion (see **Appendix B** for a sample agenda). The relatively large amount of time allocated for a retreat allows faculty to discuss issues in a more systematic and focused manner than is generally possible in regular department meetings.

Conclusions

In our view, the Department of Psychology at ISU is doing an excellent job overall. The combination of a strong faculty and superior leadership should serve the Department well. From our interviews with students, it is clear that they value the faculty's support of their efforts to learn, and that they appreciate the individual attention they receive from the faculty. This student-centered orientation provides a strong foundation for the continued success of the Department.

In planning for the future, the implementation of post-graduate assessment should help the Department continue to meet its goals. By building on its existing strengths and taking advantage of its significant potential, the Department should be able to establish a strong foundation for continued growth. For the Department to succeed in these efforts, it is important that the University in general and the College of Arts and Sciences in particular provide a level of support that is commensurate with the Department's contribution to the mission of the University.

Appendix A: Graduating Senior Exit Survey (Sample)
Psychology Department
Eastern Illinois University

Part I – Personal Information [All information will be kept confidential.]

- Name: _____
- Semester Graduating: _____
- Age: _____
- Gender: M F
- After choosing to major in psychology, what goals did you hope to accomplish through your studies?
 - General education
 - Prep for graduate school
 - Prep for professional (e.g., Medical, Law, Seminary) school
 - Prep for life skills (interpersonal relationships, parenting)
 - Prep for employment
 - Personal recovery
 - Easy/Quick major
 - Specialist Education
 - Other: _____
- How many psychology classes did you take elsewhere, and transfer to EIU?
 - None
 - 1 to 2
 - 3 to 4
 - 5 or more
- Do you have a Minor? No Yes if Yes, in what Department? _____
- Do you have a Second Major? No Yes if Yes, in what Department? _____
- Are you doing a Teacher Certification? No Yes

If you would like to receive future correspondence from the Department, such as newsletters and alumni surveys, please list your **email (non-EIU)** and **regular post office mail address** (please write legibly):

Part III – Graduate School [If you did not apply to graduate school, please skip this part.]

Please fill in the following table to indicate the schools you applied to:

	Grad School Applied	Where (City, State)	Degree (e.g., MA, MSW, PhD)	Program (e.g., Clinical, I/O, School)	Accepted?	Going?
1					Y N	Y N
2					Y N	Y N
3					Y N	Y N
4					Y N	Y N
5					Y N	Y N
6					Y N	Y N
7					Y N	Y N
8					Y N	Y N

Part V – Skill development

How much did your experiences in the Psychology department help you develop your

7. Oral communication skills?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

8. Written communication skills?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

9. Skills in reading academic materials in psychology (research articles, textbooks, etc.)

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

10. Electronic communication skills (email, online discussions, etc.)?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

11. Critical thinking skills (your ability to think through problems and develop your ideas and perspectives about psychological issues)?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

12. Research skills (designing a study, data collection, data analysis)?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

13. Computer/Technical skills (use of PC for statistical analysis, data management, & data analysis)?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

14. Teamwork/Interpersonal skills?

Not at All A Little Some Quite a Bit A Lot

20. As a psychology student here at Eastern Illinois University, which of the following computer programs have you learned and used for managing research data?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEL | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (indicate what other computer program(s) you have learned and used for data management): _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences) | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Statistician | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MINITAB | |

21. In which of the following classes did you learn and use the research data management program(s) you checked above?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological Statistics (Psy 2610) | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Statistics (Psy 4610) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research Methods and Experimental Design (Psy 3805) | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological Measurements (Psy 4620) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independent Study (Psy 3900) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (indicate below other classes where you learned and used a data management program): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Supervised Research (Psy 4100) | |

22. How confident are you about your skills in using a computer program for managing research data?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not at all confident | A Little confident | Somewhat confident | Moderately confident | Very confident |

23. How would you assess the usefulness of the skills that you gained in using a data management computer program?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not at all useful | A Little useful | Somewhat useful | Moderately useful | Very useful |

24. Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: My ability to conduct research improved as a result of my experiences as a psychology major.

- | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | ... | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree |

Appendix B: Sample Agenda for Department Retreat

12:00-1:00	Lunch Ice-Breaking Activity Overview
1:00-1:30	Session I Small Group Discussions
1:30-1:45	Groups Report
1:45-2:30	Large Group Discussion
2:30-2:45	Break
2:45-3:15	Session II Small Group Discussions
3:15-3:30	Groups Report
3:30-4:15	Large Group Discussion
4:15-4:30+	Summary and Wrap-Up