

Campus Correspondence

Southeastern Louisiana University

To: Faculty
Department of Psychology

Date: March 17, 1997

From: Major Field Assessment in Psychology Committee
Earl W. Capron, Chair
Jay Azorlosa, member
Hunter McAllister, member

Re: Assessment/Evaluation of MFA efforts for the M.A. in Psychology
for Fall, 1994 to Fall, 1996

Degree Program: M. A. PSYCHOLOGY

Purpose/Mission Statement:

The purpose of offering graduate study in the Department of Psychology is to provide students with a M.A. level of knowledge and skills that will prepare them for entry either into a Ph.D. program or a subprofessional position.

1. Goal A

To train graduate students in practical research skills and critical thinking skills.

a. Method of Assessment

(1) Criterion: A student will not be allowed to graduate with a M.A. in Psychology without at least acceptable competence in those skills listed in Working Goal A.

(a) Procedure: An understanding of research and the manner by which research is conducted is accomplished both by formal course work plus actual experience in research. All students are required to take Psyc 635 (Experimental Design and Analysis) and Psyc 636 (Nonexperimental Design and Analysis). These four hour courses cover design and statistics, but also require work on a research project as part of the course requirement. Students are required to earn a grade of at least B in these courses. All students gain actual research experience when they are required to conduct a research project for their thesis work (Psyc 770). Some students gain additional research experience through taking independent research (Psych 549) as an elective. A student's research skills and knowledge are certified by faculty committee evaluations of their performance on thesis and on their comprehensive exams.

(2) Criterion: Alumni respondents will have positive ratings in terms of the questions relating to training in research and critical thinking skills.

(a) Procedure: All of the Alumni of our M.A. program will be surveyed using the questionnaire developed by Institutional Research at SLU. The questionnaire is entitled "A Survey of Alumni of Graduate Degree Programs" and contains several questions rating satisfaction with the research training and critical thinking training.

b. Results Obtained

(1) As can be seen in Table A, students have for the most part performed well in the two new statistics/methods courses. For F'94 and F'95 the percentage of students passing the comprehensive exam in the area covered by Psyc 635 (Experimental) was 78% and 89% respectively. Given the small number of students in each class, this is consistent with the performance during the previous assessment period where 88% of the students passed their comprehensive exam. However, in F'96 the success rate was only 53%. For S'95 and S'96 the percentage of students passing the comprehensive exam in the area covered by Psyc 636 (Nonexperimental) was 79% and 89% respectively. This is slightly better than the performance during the previous assessment period where 75% of the students passed the comprehensive.

(2) For the period F'94 to F'96, 6 students completed a research project in Psyc 549. Five of the students received grades of A and one received a B for the research.

(3) As can be seen in Appendix B, twelve students successfully defended their theses during the assessment period.

(4) Institutional Research did not survey graduate alumni during the assessment period; thus, there is no data on alumni attitudes towards their training.

c. Changes in Program

In order to improve performance in the Psyc 635 course, we are considering adding an intermediate level statistics course that weaker students may need to take before taking Psyc 635. A departmental committee has been formed to determine if there are predictors of performance in Psyc 635 class that could be used to determine which students should take the intermediate level statistics course.

As can be seen in Table B, some of the faculty have been major professor for thesis projects much more often than others. To even the load limits have been placed on the number of thesis committees that a faculty member can chair at one time. This should result in a more even distribution for the next evaluation period.

d. Planned Changes

Since only a small number of the students who completed a thesis during the assessment period went through the new statistics/methods sequence, it is too early to assess the impact. The theses completed during this period will serve as the comparison for the thesis work completed by students in the revised curriculum.

2. Goal B

To provide students with a broad body of knowledge representative of the current state of knowledge in Psychology.

a. Method of Assessment

(1) Criterion: A student will not be allowed to graduate with a M.A. in Psychology without a broad base of knowledge of Psychology.

(a) Procedure: Students do not specialize in an area in the Psychology M.A. program; rather they are required to take a broad base of core courses. Thus, whether students are going on to Ph.D. programs in applied areas such as Clinical and Industrial or going on in basic research areas such as Cognitive and Physiological, they have had a broad base on which to build. Students' general knowledge is certified by faculty committee evaluations of their performance on thesis and on comprehensive exams. Additional evidence comes from performance on the LSU exams which require a broad, general knowledge of the major areas of Psychology (Note: only the subset of our students in the consortium program take these exams).

(2) Criterion: Alumni respondents who enter Ph.D. programs will have positive ratings on questions relating to how well their M.A. training prepared them for further graduate work.

a) Procedure: All of the Alumni of our M.A. program will be surveyed using the questionnaire developed by Institutional Research at SLU. The questionnaire is entitled "A Survey of Alumni of Graduate Degree Programs" and contains several questions rating satisfaction with the curriculum.

(3) Criterion: Fifty percent of the students who apply to Ph.D. programs will be admitted to a Ph.D. program.

(a) Procedure: Psychology faculty will follow up on all graduate students for whom they write letters of recommendation to graduate schools, and report the results to the Graduate Coordinator.

b. Results Obtained

(1)(a) As can be seen in Appendix A, students did extremely well on their SLU comprehensive exams in the various content (i.e., excluding Psyc 635 & 636 discussed in Goal A) areas. The overall pass rate for the content area was over 87%, with no area being below 79%.

(1)(b) As can be seen in Appendix C, the LSU consortium exam results provide a slightly less positive view of student knowledge than the SLU exams. However, the performance on these exams is dramatically better than in the last assessment period. For the period S'93 to S'94, only 29% of the exams were passed. The attempts made to improve the coordination between the SLU and LSU program initiated in F'94 were apparently successful. For the period F'94 to F'96, students passed 60% of the consortium exams (more than doubling the earlier rate). Of particular interest is the performance on the Biological Bases of Behavior. This area had been targeted for particular emphasis, and the changes have been dramatic. In the F'93 the success rate had been 17%. After the changes that resulted in a better coordination of the SLU and LSU classes, there was a 60% success rate in F'94 (It is of note that one of the SLU students scored higher than any of the LSU students that took the same exam). For F'95 the success rate was 86% with one of SLU students again achieving the top grade of all those taking the exam. And for F'96 the success rate was 79%. The problems in the area of the Biological Bases of Behavior have apparently been solved. However, there did seem to be a problem in the Cognitive Bases of Behavior for F'94 and F'95.

(2) Institutional Research did not survey graduate alumni during the assessment period; thus, there is no data on alumni attitudes towards their training.

(3) As can be seen in Appendix D, the goal of a 50% acceptance rate for those students applying to Ph.D. programs was exceeded. However, it should be noted that the number of students applying to Ph.D. programs is still lower than is desirable.

c. Changes in Program

The improvement in performance on the LSU Biological Bases of Behavior were dramatic. However, students had great difficulty with the LSU Cognitive exam. In an attempt to solve this problem, during the F'96 semester Dr. Azorlosa and Dr. Rossano team taught a course geared at the material covered on the exam. The course was taught under the general proseminar course number-Psyc 690. The results were fairly dramatic. From a 0% pass rate for the previous two tests, the rate increased to a 63%. One of the SLU students had the highest grade of any student taking the test (this includes students enrolled in LSU's Ph.D. program).

d. Planned Changes

Based on the success of the team taught course, a new course based on this approach is being planned. Given the success of both the new course and the success of the Physiological course, there are plans to make them part of a core required by all of our students (not just those in the consortium program).

3. Goal C

To permit pursuit of a Ph.D. degree in Psychology in the "Louisiana Consortium of Graduate Training in Psychology."

a. Method of Assessment

(1) Criterion: Each year at least one student will enter an LSU Ph.D. program through the consortium program. (Note: LSU limits the number of consortium students that they allow each year to 1 or 2).

(a) Procedure: These figures are obtainable from LSU each year.

(2) Criterion: SLU will have at least two faculty qualifying as LSU Affiliate Graduate Faculty Members.

(a) Procedure: These figures are obtainable from the LSU graduate catalogue each year.

b. Results Obtained

(1) One student passed all four consortium exam and entered the LSU program at the end of the F'94-S'95 year. During the F'95-S'96 time period one student passed all four consortium exams; however, this student did not finish the thesis and were thus not eligible to enter LSU.

At the end of the F'96, three students had passed 3 of the 4 exams, and it is expected that at least 2 of the 3 will

successfully meet the requirements at the end of S'97. Given our realistic expectation that two students do enter LSU for F'97 we will have met our goal.

(2) The number of SLU faculty who are the LSU graduate faculty remains at 2.

c. Changes in the Program

As discussed under Goal B, attempts have been made to improve the coordination between the SLU and LSU Psychology programs. Given the dramatic increase in our students' success on Consortium tests, these improvements appear to be successful.

d. Planned Changes

Ongoing modification of curriculum and course content as necessary.

4. Goal D

To provide students who do not immediately wish to pursue a Ph.D. with a variety of courses that will help prepare them for subprofessional positions.

a. Method of Assessment

(1) Criterion: Seventy five percent of the M.A. alumni who attempt to get jobs in Psychology will be successful.

(a) Procedure: Major professors will follow up on all of their graduate students receiving the M.A. and report the results to the Graduate Coordinator.

(2) Criterion: Alumni respondents who obtain jobs will have positive ratings on questions relating to how well their M.A. training prepared them for those jobs.

(a) Procedure: All of the Alumni of our M.A. program will be surveyed using the questionnaire developed by Institutional Research at SLU. The questionnaire is entitled "A Survey of Alumni of Graduate Degree Programs" and contains several questions rating satisfaction with how well the M.A. program trained them for jobs.

(3) Criterion: Students who plan to obtain subprofessional positions will include applied courses in their program.

(a) Procedure: Students are allowed to take up to seven hours of practicum work. Students are placed in a setting such as the Comprehensive Counseling Center on campus or the private practice of Baton Rouge Psychological Associates and allowed to engage in assessment and counseling under the guidance of a licensed Psychologist. This is a chance for students to

operate in a manner more relevant to their future professional life than would be the case in the typical classroom setting.

b. Results Obtained

(1) As can be seen in Appendix E, 100% of the graduates who attempted to find subprofessional positions were successful. Thus, the goal of a 75% success rate was achieved.

(2) Institutional Research did not survey graduate alumni during the assessment period; thus, there is no data on alumni attitudes towards their training.

(3) During assessment period, 11 students completed practicum courses.

c. Changes in the Program

Although our students have been extremely successful in obtaining employment, not as many students have taken practicum courses as would be expected. Part of the difficulty involves the prepracticum course (Psyc 681) which is a prerequisite for a counseling practicum. This course involves going through Crisis Phone training. Until recently this training was available in the Hammond area; however, this is no longer the case. Students must go to either Baton Rouge or New Orleans for this training. A faculty committee was formed with the purpose of addressing this problem. A new therapy techniques course to cover this material and to be taught by our faculty was suggested. This new course should be available for Fall, 1998.

d. Planned Changes

Other than the changes in practicum described above, there are no major changes anticipated. Our students have been extremely successful in obtaining subprofessional jobs in Psychology.