

**Review of the
Department of Psychological Sciences
Fitchburg State University**

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Executive Summary

Fitchburg State University invited me to do a site visit and a review of the Department of Psychological Sciences. The Department of Psychological Sciences sent me a well-written and detailed self-study as well as other materials well in advance of my coming to do the site visit. Before I set foot on campus, I was already deeply impressed by the department's faculty for many reasons, including their revision of their curriculum, their scholarly activity and their impressive engagement in community service at Fitchburg State University (FSU). My visit was May 3, 2019, and during that full day I met with students, faculty, Department Chair Sara Levine, Dean John Schaumlöffel, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Cathy Canney, and Dean Jacalyn Kremer. All of my interactions with faculty, students and administrators were warm, relaxed, deeply informative and very collegial. I found the faculty of the Department of Psychological Science to be incredibly hard working, deeply collaborative, engaged in impressive levels of scholarship and community service, and to be deeply committed to facilitating their students' success through a rigorous and highly relevant major. Throughout the review I make some recommendations, which are just that, suggestions, which are meant to be food for thought for this very capable and dedicated group of faculty, and for the administration as well. At the end of this review, I summarize these recommendations.

Overview

Based upon all the information I gleaned from the materials provided to me and my interactions during my visit, I will focus this review on the following aspects of the department: curriculum, faculty, physical plant, students, and assessment. I discuss each of these below.

Curriculum

The Department of Psychological Science's current curriculum was created by the faculty just recently, after they became their own department, renamed themselves, and moved to new spaces and joined the Division of Health and Natural Sciences. Their new curriculum has a number of changes designed to reflect Psychological Science's identity as a STEM science. The momentous changes in the curriculum involve substantive changes to the major, the development of two new concentrations, and the creation of the Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior interdisciplinary minor. I address each one of these in turn.

Recent Changes to the Major

The current curriculum developed by the faculty of the Department of Psychological Sciences entails changes designed to emphasize the theoretical and empirical bases of the science of psychology, as well as the desire to increase the number of high impact practices included in the major. After studying their curriculum I believe they have roundly succeeded in both their goals. The requirements that all majors take Biological Psychology and one of an array of developmental courses embody the current theoretical framework of psychology as a field, namely that all psychological processes are inherently biological, and that they undergo complex and fundamental development over time. These courses give students important knowledge regarding current theory, issues, methodologies and facts in these two domains. The requirement of History and Systems gives every major much needed background in the history of the theories and methodologies in the field of psychology.

I am deeply impressed by the requirement of the research courses Design and Analysis I, Design and Analysis II and one of several offered lab courses. These courses combine to give every major a strong scientific foundation for understanding all other coursework and content that they encounter in the rest of the major. Most impressive is that, in Design and Analysis II, each and every Psychological Sciences major conducts original research. Their experiences include coming up with a novel research question, devising a methodology for studying it, completing the Human Subjects Review application, conducting the actual research, and writing up results and interpretations. That the choice of lab courses also entails students doing research demonstrates that each major graduates having received a strong foundation in the engagement in science. I wonder if the faculty might consider adding one or two labs from those courses listed as “applied.” Students often have the erroneous belief that applied areas of psychology are somehow not “experimental” or “really scientific.” Since we know this is not the case, that extensive research is done in applied areas, and that evidenced-based practices are more and more prevalent, being able to take an “applied” lab could help counter students’ misperceptions. While labs in Clinical Psychology or Developmental Psychopathology or Psychological Science in the Schools would be wonderful, it can be more difficult to get participants and to get IRB approval. So perhaps the inclusion of a Health Psychology or Psychology of Human Relations lab, both of which can make use of FSU undergraduates, might be a beginning.

The current curriculum now includes the choice of capstone experiences which entail high impact practices. Majors have the choice of engaging in independent research, independent study, a small advanced, integrative seminar, or an internship. Each of these options entails what is valued about high impact practices, including the ability of students to work closely with a faculty member and benefit from guidance and support that are tailored to their interests and abilities, and the opportunity to get in-depth hands-on experience that allows students to apply and integrate what they have learned in the major. During my visit I learned from faculty and the Chair that some independent research proposals were denied recently. Without knowing the context or reasons for why this was the case, I would hope that administration would do all they can to support the proliferation of what is known to be a deeply enriching high impact practice which gives students the tools and knowledge to succeed in graduate school and in jobs. Such a practice aligns with FSU’s vision to “prepare students for a global society through curricular

innovation and program development,” as well as the university’s goal from the strategic plan to “strengthen academic programs.”

I would like to take a moment to focus on the capstone option of internships. It is the Department of Psychological Sciences’ faculty’s estimation that the number of students doing an internship is lower than they would prefer. I perceive what could be road blocks to students’ engagement in internships, and I delineate them here along with suggestions for how to modify the requirements such that more students could avail themselves of this option. These are only suggestions, as I leave it to the faculty, with their wisdom and experience, to decide what, if any changes they might make to the requirements for doing an internship. I wish to say that I was deeply, deeply impressed by the depth and quality of the Internship Policies and Procedures Manual, and that it is very clear that the department has put enormous energy and thought into devising the internship experience. My suggestions are made with the deepest respect for their work as a department.

First, the department rarely allows students to do paid internships. As I discuss below under “Students”, not all students can fit an unpaid internship into their busy lives, which include for many students part- or full-time work required to support themselves and pay for school. Many institutions allow for paid internships, and it is a very straight forward process to delineate what activities will and won’t count for an internship. I suggest that the faculty discuss whether or not students at FSU be able to do a paid internship.

Another reason few students may opt to do an internship could be the number of credits/hours currently required to complete one. The fewest credit option is to do 6 credits, which requires at least 15 hours a week to complete. This requirement also may make it too difficult for students who work as well in addition to going to school. Many institutions offer a 3-credit option, and I encourage the faculty to consider doing so as well.

A further possible road block for students to do an internship may be the extensive process required to apply for one. Students are expected to think of doing an internship, and to discuss it with their advisers a full year before actually doing one. There is one meeting which they must attend, whether or not that is possible given their schedules. Students need a letter of recommendation from a faculty member to accompany their application, and they must also meet with a faculty member who will vet them for the experience. While I sincerely applaud the intention to have only students capable of a high level of professionalism participate in an internship, I think it’s possible that many students could find the prolonged application process daunting. I encourage faculty to consider ways in which they might streamline the application process while still obtaining the important goal of discerning which students are appropriate for an internship capstone experience.

One area in the curriculum that faculty have expressed the desire to strengthen is its diversity offerings. With this in mind they have hired a new faculty member, who will start in fall 2019, who will teach a Cross Cultural course. Given the expertise of one of the faculty members, I thought perhaps he could teach a Psychology of Religion course, as such a course would expose students to diverse religions and world views. When I mentioned this to him, it turned out he has just submitted such a course. I believe these two new courses are positive steps in the direction of offering students courses that speak to the diversity of human psychological functioning and experiences in the world.

New Concentrations within the Major

In creating a new curriculum of the major, the faculty of the Department of Psychological Sciences created two new concentrations, the Cognitive Science Concentration and the Applied Psychology Concentration. I believe that both concentrations do an exceptional job of preparing students either for graduate school or for a myriad of jobs and careers. In particular, Cognitive Neuroscience is a very dynamic domain within psychology with a rapidly growing number of graduate programs and careers. Having students take Biological Psychology, Cognitive Neuroscience and the Sensation and Perception Lab combine to give students a strong background for this growing subfield. In addition, many of the applied courses, combined together, give students a strong foundation for a wide array of possible careers, including School Psychology, Clinical and Developmental Clinical Psychology, Health Psychology, Human Relations and I/O. Both of these concentrations give students a strong foundation in psychology as a science, whether they choose to take a predominantly research or applied direction.

New Neuroscience, Behavior and Cognition (NBC) Minor

What makes the Psychological Sciences faculty so impressive is that, not only did they change the major and create two new concentrations, they also collaborated in creating a new interdisciplinary minor. Interdisciplinary programs are recognized as playing a key role in doing just what FSU says is part of its vision, to “prepare students for a global society...,” and both the natural and social sciences are now increasingly interdisciplinary. The Department of Psychological Sciences it to be extolled for its role in the creation of and its participation in this minor.

Faculty

At present there are 13 full-time faculty in the Department of Psychological Sciences, and they will have a new addition starting in fall of 2019. Overall, the department will have recently hired three full-time faculty. Each new hire has been motivated by the department’s priorities for their new curriculum, including adding faculty to teach in the new concentrations and to teach courses on diversity. With the addition of the three new faculty comes the need to mentor them so that they can adjust to and successfully manage the competing demands of their new positions, to help them understand the requirements for tenure and promotion, and promote and support their engagement in activities that will lead to their success at FSU. I encourage the faculty to generate a mentoring program that will help with the attainment of these objectives.

I met with the faculty in two separate meetings, and I was deeply impressed by several things. That they devised a brand new major, two new concentrations and collaborated in creating a new interdisciplinary minor speaks to the faculty’s collective sense of vision, their tremendous capacity for prolonged hard work, and their collegiality and ability to work together toward the greater good for their students. Their collegiality was in evident in both meetings, with faculty being careful to make sure that all were heard. Faculty members expressed great satisfaction with their new office and research spaces, and also discussed needs for equipment, materials, and a larger space (all discussed below under “Departmental Physical Plant”). Several

mentioned how the new space has facilitated interactions and collaborations, as well as the support of students. Faculty discussed increased demands on teaching and advising arising out of the student body having increasing needs and difficulties. The discussion made apparent the faculty's caring for and commitment to students and their success.

Many of the faculty are engaged in research leading to presentations at conferences and to publications. Their standings in their scientific communities are acknowledged by their roles as journal editorial board members, conference reviewers, and as grant reviewers. Several faculty are also mentoring undergraduate research, known to be a very important high impact practice. The department's new research facilities are deeply needed and warranted to meet the research demands of faculty and students. Quite a few faculty teach research courses which involve students doing research. Given the amount and diversity of research being conducted by the department (both faculty and students), they could benefit from increased research space and specialized equipment. I discuss these needs below under "Departmental Physical Plant."

An examination of the department's self-study makes readily apparent just how involved the faculty are in community service, at the departmental, university-wide and larger community levels. At the department level, the entire department has been heavily involved in curricular issues, and some faculty have also focused on assessment tasks. Faculty are engaged with Psi Chi, the PEC, the Hiring Committee and the Departmental Research Oversight Committee. At the university-wide level, faculty are in leadership roles on key committees, including AUC, IRB, Graduate Counseling, and the Fitchburg State Honors Program. The list of committees that faculty are on at the university level is quite impressive, including but not limited to Grad Council, First-Year Experience Committee, University Faculty Scholarship Committee, the Executive Committee and the Commonwealth Honors Program Council. And some faculty engage in community service at the greater community level, including being the Conductor of the Community Orchestra, Director of Community Music Lesson Program, and conducting research that directly impacts the citizens of the surrounding community.

The Department of Psychological Science's faculty have a far reaching impact on the university. Their high level of engagement in university-wide community service is linked to a steep rise in the number of sections of courses taught by adjuncts, having currently reached 25%. While the MSCA contract no longer stipulates the 15% adjunct rule for each department, it is well established that students' connections to full-time faculty play an important role in promoting retention. While FSU administrators have invested in the Department of Psychological Sciences through the recent three hires of full-time faculty (some are replacements), I encourage them to consider adding another full-time line to the department to keep the adjunct level below 15%.

Departmental Physical Plant

Offices

Since their last program review, the faculty have moved into a new renovated building, and have new offices. The majority of faculty offices are now grouped together, and in the two meetings I had with faculty, they expressed unanimously that the new spaces, both the offices themselves, and the arrangement of offices, promote more interactions and collegiality among

faculty and students, and facilitate the faculty's support of students because colleagues are now near enough to be consulted readily. The Department Chair's office is spacious, bright and inviting, with adequate space for meeting with faculty and students. I found the overall departmental space to be well laid out and appealing.

Research/Teaching/Meeting Space

The department now has brand new, excellent research space, divided into many rooms, some with specified equipment for particular types of research, others with one-way mirrors, and it appears that the space is adequate to the research needs, with one exception. The rooms are relatively small, and do not support research that includes many participants at a time. I believe that the department could use a large multipurpose room with modular tables on wheels that can be moved into several configurations. One purpose for this room would be to hold departmental meetings, both for the entire department and for departmental committees. The tables could be configured together to create a conference table for such meetings. The room could also be used for research that would allow for a large group of participants at a time, which would greatly support the research projects that all majors do in Research Design and Analysis II, as well as research done for the lab courses, and for student and faculty research. The tables could be separated to allow for paper and pencil research, as well as the use of laptops. Dean John Schaumlöffel discussed in a meeting with myself and Chair Sara Levine that there are caddies that have many laptops in them that can be moved in and out of rooms for either classroom work or research. This set up would be ideal for being able to conduct computerized research in this multi-purpose room. The room could also be used for teaching both Research Design and Analysis courses, as well as for lab courses, if indeed multiple laptops were available. And this room could be used as student space during certain hours on different days, giving them a space to socialize and collaborate in studying and on group projects. I strongly suggest that the administration consider designating a room for the department for these multiple purposes.

Equipment/Staff Support

At the present time, the Psychological Sciences Department has an Administrative Assistant only part-time, and not over the summer months. The department has laid out numerous reasons why their needs will only be properly met with the assistance of a full-time Administrative Assistant, and I whole heartedly agree with these reasons. The reasons include the timing of (a) many budgetary tasks and deadlines, (b) when advisers are assigned to majors, (c) the occurrence of staff trainings, (d) assistance to new faculty, (e) changes in summer course offerings, (f) faculty governance and catalog activities, (g) the need for room reservations to be booked, and (h) the summer hiring of adjuncts. For all of these reasons, I strongly suggest that the administration extend the Administrative Assistant to full-time status. In a meeting with Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Cathy Canney, Department Chair Sara Levine and myself, Cathy stated that FSU is looking to extend multiple Administrative Assistants to full-time status, and I would request that the Psychological Sciences Department's Administrative Assistant be included on that list.

Since their last review, the Department of Psychological Sciences has changed its name and has changed schools to reflect better its standing as a STEM science. In comparison with

other departments in the Division of Health and Natural Sciences, the department of Psychological Science's overall budget, and budget for equipment, is smaller. As a science, this department needs adequate funding for equipment for lab and clinical courses as well as for faculty and student research. For clinical courses, it is imperative that they have the necessary current standardized tests so that students can be prepared for jobs in the field. Toward this end, the department is requesting the purchase of the current Woodcock Johnson test. The department is also requesting an eye tracker to support the teaching of certain courses and labs, and for faculty and student research. I strongly support the department's attainment of the necessary resources for these purchases, as they will support the department's engagement in teaching and student research in a way that supports the university's vision for achieving academic excellence.

Students

I met with a group of wonderful students who had a great deal to say about their experiences in the Department of Psychological Sciences at FSU. All of the students participated, and the points I raise below were voiced by more than one student, often by most or all of them.

Faculty

Uniformly, the students expressed great satisfaction with their faculty. They stated that faculty are warm, kind, helpful, enthusiastic and inspiring. Students said that faculty were available to help them both in and outside of the classroom and that there was a nice balance among faculty regarding faculty focus on research and teaching. The students expressed that they felt the faculty were deeply dedicated to their teaching, and to helping students succeed in the major.

Courses

The first thing students brought up when I asked them to state what was positive about the department was the course "Consciousness." They spoke with great enthusiasm of the value of having two professors, each from a different department (Psychological Sciences, Philosophy) teach the course because they gained two different perspectives on the same material. Given the extremely positive reaction the students had to this course, and the diversity of perspectives within the Psychological Sciences faculty, the department might consider what other courses in the major and/or concentrations could be team-taught.

There was an extensive discussion of internships, with the focus on wanting it to be possible to do a paid internship. Students talked passionately about the hardships of going to school full time and working, often full time, to support themselves, thereby leaving them neither the time nor the financial resources to put in many additional hours a week at an unpaid internship. As I discussed above, the department wishes to grow the number of students taking the internship course, and I believe allowing for paid internships could lead to a significant rise in those numbers, and I encourage to department to consider this change to their internship policy.

Finally, students spoke about online and hybrid courses. They stated that while they missed the in-person interactions of a face-to-face class when taking online courses, they still took online courses because they fit into the students' busy schedules. The students indicated that they really liked hybrid courses because they wed in-person benefits with the flexibility of an online course.

Advising

The students agreed that faculty do an excellent job advising students regarding what courses to take and how to progress through the major. They were equally in agreement that the advising they receive does not adequately prepare them for life beyond FSU (this of course is the students' perspective, and does not preclude that the Psychological Sciences department is already advising students concerning possible careers and graduate school).

The students themselves had creative suggestions for how to give majors more opportunities to learn about graduate school and possible jobs and careers. One suggestion was to have a job fair specifically aimed at Psychological Science majors, bringing in personnel from different agencies to talk about job openings and internship possibilities. Another suggestion was to bring onto campus recent graduates from the Psychological Sciences major to talk about their current jobs and career aspirations.

One suggestion I have is to set aside time in each Introduction to Psychological Sciences course to address possibilities for graduate school and different careers in psychology. Another idea would be to create a 1-3 credit course on Careers in Psychology. A third suggestion is to engage in group advising for first-year students, in which the role of internships and independent research in getting into graduate school and obtaining jobs could be discussed, as well as outlining what types of jobs are typically available to students with a bachelor's degree in Psychological Sciences.

Assessment

Given how new the Psychological Sciences curriculum is, it follows that the assessment processes are in fairly new stages too. The department has begun to assess its new curriculum in important ways. I have a few suggestions intended to help facilitate the assessment process going forward.

First, I encourage the department to include all five American Psychological Association's (APA) goals as stipulated in their APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major. The two goals which you currently do not include are Goal 3: Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World, and Goal 5: Professional Development. I believe with confidence that you are already engaging students in educational activities which meet these goals. For example, for Goal 3, your students are filling out an IRB application, and they are learning about ethics in Design and Analysis II. Therefore it is possible for you to choose baccalaureate indicators that you could assess for Goal 3 with relative ease. Regarding Goal 5, you have students in internships, and they apply their Psychological Science knowledge to workplace settings. Again, I think you could choose at least one baccalaureate indicator to

assess in a fairly straightforward manner. Parts of your evaluation of students in the internship capstone may already do this.

Second, before making any more changes to the major, I encourage you to complete your curriculum map first. As you know, the purpose of the curriculum map is to guide all ensuing decisions about how to revise the curriculum based upon what the map tells you regarding how well you are attaining your goals. As you have indicated in your assessment timeline, creating a curriculum map can take some time. And it will become more complicated were you to include all 5 of the APA's goals. So I would encourage you to delay your revisions of the internship capstone and any other curricular changes until after you have completed your curriculum map.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I was deeply impressed with the faculty of the Department of Psychological Sciences before I met them based upon their self-study, and my interactions with them only deepened my respect and admiration for them. The department has a clear vision for what they want their students to attain. They have worked collaboratively to create a new curriculum based on their joint vision, and it is very innovative and strong and includes important and varied high-impact practices. Psychology Science majors think very highly of their faculty as teachers and mentors and feel deeply supported by them. The faculty's level of engagement in research, their mentorship of undergraduate research, and the high level of student research embedded in the major all justify the department's new research spaces and their need for additional space and equipment. In addition to their high teaching loads, advising duties and student mentorship, the Department of Psychological Science's faculty are dedicated to impacting numerous aspects of university life, as evidenced by their impressive level of engagement in community service. Overall, the Department of Psychological Sciences has a wonderful, dedicated, and talented faculty and a terrific new curriculum.

Below are some recommendations and suggestions for the faculty to consider:

1. Work with administrators, if they prove willing, to delineate how you would make use of a multipurpose space to facilitate teaching, faculty and student research, departmental community service and student life.
2. Work with administrators, if they prove willing, to obtain needed equipment and materials, and to obtain full-time status for your Administrative Assistant.
3. Work together, following from your goals for your curriculum, to delineate a new faculty line, should the administration make one available to you to lower your use of adjuncts to below 15%.
4. Consider curricular changes that could make the internship capstone more accessible to students, extend the lab experiences to more applied courses, and increase, with the support of administrators, students' engagement in independent research.
5. Engage in new advising practices to increase student awareness of graduate school and career opportunities.

6. Devise a mentorship program for the three new faculty hires to help facilitate their acclimation to and management of the competing demands of their new positions, and to guide them through the processes required for the successful attainment of tenure.
7. Consider framing your curriculum with all five of the APA goals for undergraduate psychology majors, and delaying future curricular changes until after you have completed your curriculum map.

Let me take a moment now to thank Chair Sara Levine, the faculty, administrators and students for facilitating this review process, and for making me feel so welcome. It has been a pleasure to review such an outstanding department. The materials you sent me were extremely informative and helpful, and our interactions were highly educational and collegial. I am deeply confident that the Department of Psychological Sciences will continue to impact their students' learning and achievement in positive ways by moving forward in their curriculum development and in augmenting their current advising practices. Please contact me (bkanner@worchester.edu; 508-929-8782) to obtain any elaborations or clarifications that you need.

Respectfully submitted,

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