Form E-1-A for Boston College Undergraduate Programs

Program: Psychology

1) Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they? (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect its majors to have acquired before they graduate?)

The department has identified four primary learning goals, each with several associated student learning outcomes.

Goal 1. Students will acquire a knowledge of the subfields of psychology in a manner that reflects both breadth and depth of understanding.

   Student Learning Outcome 1a. Students will be able to demonstrate general knowledge of the theories, concepts, and findings of each of the subfields of psychology.

   Student Learning Outcome 1b. Students will be able to demonstrate expertise in one specific area in psychology.

Goal 2. Students will acquire the knowledge and skills to read research reports critically and to carry out their own independent research.

   Student Learning Outcome 2a. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of basic statistical applications in psychology including appropriate ways of describing data and the issues involved in inferring from a sample to a population.

   Student Learning Outcome 2b. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the basic methodologies used in psychological research and to evaluate critically the research design of an experiment.

   Student Learning Outcome 2c. Students will be able to review the literature on a topic and frame the next question to be answered or problem to be solved and show an appreciation of the value of programmatic research.

   Student Learning Outcome 2d. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the necessary laboratory techniques and procedures in their area of focus.

   Student Learning Outcome 2e. Students will be able to demonstrate an appreciation of the ethical issues involved in human and animal research.

Goal 3. Students will acquire critical, scientific thinking skills.

   Student Learning Outcome 3a. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for the need for rigor and healthy skepticism when making scientific arguments and drawing conclusions from data.
Student Learning Outcome 3b. Students will be able to evaluate critically the conclusions that are drawn concerning the causal relationship among variables, particularly the problems associated with correlational data and the need to isolate the effect of an independent variable.

Student Learning Outcome 3c. Students will be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a scientific argument, including issues of validity, reliability, power, and operational definition.

Goal 4. Students will acquire skills to succeed in their professional, personal, and community lives after graduation.

Student Learning Outcome 4a. Students will be able to compete successfully for admission to graduate school in psychology and related fields and to succeed in their graduate training.

Student Learning Outcome 4b. Students will be able to succeed better in their chosen professions.

Student Learning Outcome 4c. Students will be able to communicate effectively in writing.

Student Learning Outcome 4d. Students will be able to understand themselves and others better.

Student Learning Outcome 4e. Students will be able to assume better the responsibilities of membership in their community.

Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific. (Where are the department’s learning expectations accessible to potential majors: on the web or in the catalog or in your departmental major handouts?)

These goals and outcomes will be published on the department website, and in appropriate handouts distributed by the department.

Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree? What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?

1. An anonymous exit survey will be administered to graduating senior psychology majors

2. We will seek direct evidence about how well students have achieved our learning outcomes from samples of three kinds of student work:
Senior theses and scholar’s projects

Poster presentations at our annual Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference

Selected course papers

To evaluate this student work we shall use quantitative rubrics (customized for each kind of work) to evaluate the level of attainment of our student learning outcomes. For theses, scholar’s projects, and poster presentations, the rubrics will measure (when appropriate) the students’ ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing, generate appropriate and clear research questions, employ appropriate techniques and methodologies to answer these questions, use descriptive and inferential statistics, reach valid conclusions based on thoughtful interpretation of the data, produce convincing scientific arguments concerning causation, and show concern for the welfare of their subjects. We shall also collect data concerning the number of students who conduct independent research or have worked in research laboratories.

For course papers, the rubrics will measure (when appropriate) the students' breadth and depth of knowledge of the empirical findings and theory in the area. Rubrics will also measure the students' ability to communicate effectively in writing, analyze scientific arguments, identify the next question to be asked in a line of research, construct compelling scientific arguments, and relate scientific issues to broader issues of human wellbeing.

We shall also produce qualitative evaluations of students' work. We shall ask instructors to identify aspects of students' work that they view as needing improvement. The identities of the students, courses, and faculty associated with all data sources will remain anonymous. We shall not necessarily evaluate each student learning outcome every year.

4) Who interprets the evidence? What is the process? (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

Each year the department will meet to review the results, both qualitative and quantitative, of the analyses and to discuss changes that might be implemented to improve student learning. The faculty will also discuss the strengths and weakness of the assessment procedures and consider potential changes in the procedures including the goals and the methods to evaluate them. In addition to the analyses of the committee, suggestions for improvement in undergraduate teaching will be solicited from course instructors and thesis advisers. In the future, the analyses will also focus on the results of specific changes that had been implemented on the basis of earlier analyses. The conclusions that are reached at these meetings will be recorded in a written report.