

Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

Department/Program Psychology & Neuroscience

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

Learning Goal 1: Students will acquire a basic understanding of the topics studied and the methodologies used in the field of psychology.

- Learning Outcome 1a: Students will be able to demonstrate a general knowledge of theories, concepts, and findings in at least one subfield of psychology.
- Learning Outcome 1b: Students will understand better some of the different methodological approaches, paradigms, and technologies that have been used to study psychological processes.

Learning Goal 2: Students will gain critical thinking and writing skills and put them to use through the process of scientific inquiry.

- Learning Outcome 2a: Students will be able to consider competing hypotheses and to understand how data can adjudicate among those hypotheses.
- Learning Outcome 2b: Students will be able to evaluate critically contemporary data relating to psychology including media claims and graphical depictions of data.
- Learning outcome 2c: Students will be able to summarize psychological theory and research in concise accurate scientific writing.

Learning Goal 3: Students will acquire a better understanding of how psychological research methods are used to address perennial questions in psychology.

- Learning Outcome 3a: Students will be able to see how psychological study is complementary to other approaches to understanding and reflecting on the human condition.
- Learning Outcome 3b: Students will be able to express how the material learned is relevant to aspects of their daily lives, such as their behaviors and their interactions with others.

Learning Goal 4. Students will acquire skills to help them succeed in their personal and community lives after graduation.

- Learning Outcome 4a: Students will be able to demonstrate an appreciation of the ethical issues involved in human or animal research.
- Learning Outcome 4b: Students will be able to understand better themselves and others.

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

The goals and outcomes are published on the department website and in appropriate handouts distributed by the department.

3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

- 1) Evaluation of ratings and comments on student course evaluations.
- 2) Survey of students (approximately every other year) who have taken core courses

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?)

The Undergraduate Assessment Committee meets periodically to review the results, both qualitative and quantitative, and to discuss changes that might be implemented to improve student learning. The committee also discusses the assessment procedures and considers potential changes in the procedures. The department's Undergraduate Assessment Committee coordinates with instructors of core courses to develop these assessments.

5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

Analyses of the student course evaluations for our Core courses for Fall 2023 (2 sections each of PSYC1111, Self, Mind & Society, and PSYC1110, Brain, Mind & Behavior) find that these courses were well-received by students. On a 5 pt scale, the two sections of PSYC1111 were rated 4.30 and 4.32 respectively for the quality of the instruction, and 4.16 and 4.13 for the course overall. The two sections of PSYC1110 received average ratings of 3.18 and 4.43 for the quality of the instruction, and 3.22 and 3.97 for the course.

With regard to specific learning objectives, here are some illustrative quotes from student comments on evaluations:

LO1 (basic understanding of topics/methodologies):

- "The strengths of this course were manifold, particularly in its comprehensive coverage of psychology. Despite my initial unfamiliarity with lecture-style classes, I appreciated the effective teaching approach in this course. Each class offered a wealth of information, yet it was presented in a manageable and digestible manner. Professor XXX excelled in making the lectures engaging and thought-provoking, which significantly enhanced my learning experience."
- "This course help me build a foundation for future psychology courses."
- "The broad range of topics was taught thoroughly, allowing for a comprehensive window into the field. If I had taken this course earlier I likely would have declared psychology."

LO2 (critical thinking and writing skills):

- "The cohorts discussions were very helpful on applying the material which benefited me to understanding it on the exam."
- "While I was hesitant at first about the way this particular course was taught, overall I feel like I learned so much from not having access to the presentations before class and from not being

given a study guide. Both of these factors pushed me to work much harder and in the end understand the material much more.”

- This course is a good and necessary introduction to the field of psychology. It has been some time I've engaged with this topic since taking AP Psychology in high school so it allowed me to refresh my memory of the material and grasp a better understanding of some of the subtopics! Moreover, it gave me some practice with learning how to gauge with the most important details of a reading (a skill I have yet to master), which only reinforces my positive impression of this course.

LO3 (better understanding of how psych research addresses perennial questions):

- “It gives you a good intro to psych and shows how applicable and relevant it is and also how it is a science.”
- “loved the real world applications learned in the course and getting to apply skills with other classmates”
- “you learn a variety of psych concepts that are useful to those in and not in the major”

LO 4 (Students will acquire skills to help them succeed in their personal and community lives after graduation.)

- “I honestly think that everyone should be required to take this course. Everything we learned was super applicable to life in general and helping us to understand ourselves and others, which will be important for all of us throughout the rest of our lives.”
- “Well organized, interesting and applicable content”
- “This course is a great introduction to the basics of social psychology. Various interesting topics are covered from speech development to psychological disorders. This course helps students to become more aware of the social dynamics and experiences in the world around us.”
- “It deals with lots of contemporary issues – such as mental health, learning disabilities, etc. – and I feel like I better understand people and society as a whole.”
- I learned a ton of information that was new and relevant to my own life. I enjoyed how applicable everything we learned was and how we often used real life examples during class.

As has been the case for years, the weakest evidence of success was for discipline-specific writing skills (LO 2). However, since our number of student majors has nearly doubled in the last five years, and we continue to contribute heavily to offering seats in both Social Science (PSYC1111) and Natural Science (PSYC1110), our course rosters for these two core courses were all at 250-275 students. With courses of this size, instructors have had to adapt to pedagogy that does not allow much in the way of instruction on science writing.

6) Date of the most recent program review. (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

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