Model for Department-Based Assessment Loop for a Single Departmental Learning Goal

Division: Social Sciences  Department: Psychology

Departmental Learning Goal:¹
Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.

Departmental Learning Objectives:
1. Identify and describe different research methods used by psychologists—including quantitative and qualitative approaches.
2. Design and conduct basic studies to address psychological questions using appropriate research methods.
3. Critique research conclusions appropriately based on the parameters of particular research methods.

I. Learning Strategies
The strategy for achieving goals and objectives is the departmental curriculum, as well as extracurricular offerings and opportunities sponsored by the department.

II. Learning Assessments
1. The department’s Research Methods course uses a rubric to assess achievement of a number of objectives in the final research project. The final research project requires the students to develop a simple research question, identify an appropriate method to address the question, execute the method, analyze the results, and report on findings and implications. A rubric is a rating scale that identifies examples of levels of success for each cognitive dimension, skill, or objective being evaluated.

The department’s rubric for the project rated the research projects on the understanding of the methods available (Departmental Learning Objective #1), appropriateness of method selected (Departmental Learning Objective #2), design of the study (Departmental Learning Objective #2), analytical skills displayed (Departmental Learning Objective #3), and appropriateness of conclusions (Departmental Learning Objective #3). (The rubric also includes evaluation of other departmental learning objectives, such as presentation skills, which fall under different departmental goals related to scholarly communication.) Scores on each of the various ratings are averaged across students so

that the department can identify areas of strength and weakness of the course in preparing students.

2. A faculty member administers a multiple-choice test of appropriate standardized items (e.g. from GRE – items relating to departmental learning objectives 1-3) in senior capstone course. These are tracked and reported longitudinally, and discussed by faculty.

3. As part of an external review four years ago, the department surveyed alumni. Several open ended questions were included:
   a. How well prepared were you for post-baccalaureate endeavors?
   b. What aspects of your psychology education helped with learning and why?
   c. What might the department do differently to help students learn more effectively?
   The results were summarized and discussed by faculty.

One Conclusion:
Through several of these assessments the department discovered that students had good abilities to understand and use quantitative research methods, but did not understand qualitative data and methods as well.

III. Using the Results

Adding an additional course on Qualitative Methods was not feasible. The department instead revised individual course objectives in three core courses to include examples and practice with qualitative research. The department increased the coverage of qualitative techniques in the Research Methods course and added test questions on the final exam which would allow for continued assessment of this area. This finding also led to additional department discussions of their goals regarding research methods and moving to a more standardized curriculum for the Research Methods course, which out of necessity is taught by different faculty members each term. These curricular modifications were assessed by monitoring the rubric results over time.