Departmental Mission and Goals

The aim of the Psychology Department is to provide students with an understanding of human behavior that will support their ability to participate as informed members of our society, to help others, and to add to scientific knowledge.

One path to this goal involves mastery of the theoretical concepts psychologists use in describing and understanding behavior; the other involves competence in the use of the scientific methodologies employed in the study of behavior. We emphasize the importance of both concepts and methods across diverse topic areas within psychology, including biological, cognitive, social, and personality.

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From the description above, there are 3 general Psychology Department goals for student learning.

Goal 1: Students will gain a broad understanding of human behavior, from a variety of perspectives.

Strategies for achieving this goal:
A) A common introductory Psychology course that all majors and minors take covers a broad range of perspectives within the discipline. All faculty members in the department teach a section of the course—each member (representing a distinct specialty within the field) contributes a set of readings and concepts to be covered in the class.
B) A breadth requirement in the curriculum requires one course from each of three areas: Biological, Cognitive, Complex Human Behavior

Goal 2: Students will learn to treat questions and claims about behavior rigorously, with an empirical approach.

Strategies for achieving this goal:
A) A required research methods and statistics course, with lab
B) Two additional laboratory methods courses

Goal 3: Students will master the skills to contribute new knowledge in the field
(Related Teagle Assessment Project: Assessment of preparedness for senior research experience)

The learning objectives of the pre-senior laboratory curriculum:
Students will be able to:

- Identify a novel research question that arises from the primary literature.
- Design a coherent experimental study, with clearly operationalized independent and dependent variables, and appropriate experimental controls.
- Create a survey instrument with reliable items.
- Write a proposal for IRB (or IACUC) approval, demonstrating attention to the ethical principles of research involving humans (or animals).
- Determine the appropriate data analysis technique for a given study design.
- Analyze data using SPSS, and create graphical representations of results.
- Produce a write-up of a research study, in APA style, with appropriate components (abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion).

Strategies for achieving this goal:

A) General research training described above, and the specific pre-senior research curriculum:

All Psychology majors must complete a set of three research courses prior to embarking on the senior thesis. These include Psychology 200: Experimental Methods and Statistics (or its equivalent at Bryn Mawr, Psychology 205), plus two specialized laboratory courses, each taken concurrently with its 200-level topic course.

Psychology 200 is required of all majors, and it must be taken prior to completion of the specialized lab courses described below. Most students take this course during their sophomore or junior years. The course has a required weekly laboratory section, during which students implement the statistical techniques that they learn in class. The laboratory sections also involve study design, and original data collection using both survey instruments and experimental manipulations. This course is intended to prepare students for the area-specific lab courses, ½ credit courses that are taken concurrently with the topic course with which it is associated.

Presently, the curriculum includes 7 such courses, 3 of which are typically offered in a given year:

- Psychology 313: Laboratory in Memory and Cognition
- Psychology 315: Laboratory in Personality Psychology
- Psychology 317: Laboratory in Biological Psychology
- Psychology 320: Laboratory in the Psychology of Time
- Psychology 324: Laboratory in Social Psychology
- Psychology 341: Laboratory in Pain and Pain Inhibition
Psychology 360: Laboratory in Cognitive Neuroscience

Each course requires students to develop an original research project that is carried out over the course of the semester, perform the data analysis, and write a research paper describing the study and its results. The specific technical skills acquired, and the nature of the study designed (e.g., correlational or experimental), depend entirely on the specific courses that are available over a given 2-3 year period. For those students that are unable to enroll in a lab course prior to the senior year, we also allow students to complete one of their lab credits by working on an independent study research project with a faculty member. The student must meet weekly with the faculty member and perform all of the same assignments as a student taking a regular laboratory course.

Students with interest in carrying out senior research in a particular area are advised to take the specific lab course in that area. However, this is not always practical, due to leave patterns, study abroad plans, and enrollment pressures. Students rarely have freedom of choice over which particular lab courses they take to satisfy major requirements. Furthermore, although we strongly recommend that students satisfy their lab course requirements by the senior year, occasionally, seniors enroll in a lab course while completing their senior research. The effects of such enrollment patterns on the overall preparation for the senior thesis should be examined.

B) Senior capstone experience—two-semester empirical research project, which involves developing an original empirical question, designing a study to address the question, presenting the study and its results on two occasions, collecting data, analyzing data.