External Reviewers’ Narrative Report: Undergraduate Programs

Program Outcomes

The undergraduate programs at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) emphasize a traditional liberal arts education with strong foundations in coursework designed to promote critical thinking skills and a healthy sense of skepticism that is critical to the empirical study of psychological science. The undergraduate programs of study focus on quantitative approaches to research and provide a core set of courses and experiences that complement laboratory and applied experiences provided by departmental faculty. Comparison of UTC programs and resources to local, regional, and national peer and aspirational-peer institutions reveal that programming is consistent with those of peer-institutions but that resources may fall short of comparable institutions, particularly with respect to number of faculty in the program given the number of majors and student credit hour production per FTE.

Program and Learning Outcomes

• The departmental mission statement emphasizes a strong liberal arts education with a focus on fostering critical thinking, reading, and speaking skills while providing a breadth and depth of training in psychology. These goals are consistent with the university mission and with the university’s QEP that emphasizes critical thinking.
• Departmental vision and goal statements are not articulated as clearly as the mission statement. Greater specificity of departmental goals and outcomes should be pursued as part of departmental strategic planning efforts in which the department develops a clear vision for the department and the curriculum.
• Curricular goals and outcomes should match departmental goals and outcomes and should be imbedded in course syllabi so that assessment of student learning outcomes can be conducted in a more systematic manner. It is recommended that the departmental faculty review the APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major (http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.pdf) to develop goals and outcomes that are appropriate for UTC. Critically, accrediting bodies are placing a greater emphasis on demonstrating a mature assessment process in which goals and outcomes are assessed in a systematic manner. This process of “closing the loop” should result in student learning outcome assessment results being used to refine the curriculum in an iterative process.
• The utility of standardized exams for assessing the effectiveness of the undergraduate curriculum is undermined by low student motivation due to the absence of consequences for poor performance. The department should continue to work with the university to increase student motivation to perform well on the Major Fields Test.
• Students appear to be well informed about research and applied (field) experiences available within and outside of the department. These opportunities appear to be sufficient in number to satisfy undergraduate student demand.
• Student’s admittance to and performance in graduate school is not systematically tracked at the department level, nor is placement into occupational positions related to major fields of study. Anecdotal evidence suggests good job prospects for students and employer satisfaction with UTC graduates. Tracking of students post graduation requires substantial resources and investment of time. Such an effort is best coordinated at the university level.
Faculty development will be particularly important in the coming years as new faculty are hired and existing faculty work toward meeting tenure and promotion requirements. As new faculty join the department, organized training on departmental policies and procedures will be essential (particularly training on the online advising software). Finally, faculty expressed a desire to better integrate new faculty into the department and to promote a collegial environment.

**Evaluation of Program Outcomes**

- The use of standardized testing appears to be the primary method of evaluating program outcomes. As noted in the review materials, the adequacy of these measures is suspect and the department is working with the university to increase student motivation to perform well on these measures. Greater course-level assessment of learning objectives related to program-level goals is recommended. Syllabi for undergraduate courses should clearly articulate learning objectives and how they will be assessed. The department should consider developing an assessment plan that outlines how student-learning measures will be assessed and how the result of the assessment will be used to modify the curriculum.

**Use of Evaluation Information**

- Annual EDO reviews incorporate student evaluations of teaching in the review process and the department head uses institutional research data to advocate for resources. Program evaluation data from alumni and employers needs to be collected as part of a university-wide effort to evaluate programs. The department does not have the resources necessary to conduct formal surveys of alumni and employers.

**Curriculum**

**Appropriateness of Curriculum**

- The department offers a strong undergraduate curriculum that offers both breadth and depth in the core and applied areas of psychology. The curriculum is consistent with APA guidelines for the undergraduate major that are designed to ensure that students receive a high-quality undergraduate education.

**Regular Review of Curriculum**

- The undergraduate curriculum has not undergone any substantial changes over the past five years. To ensure that the curriculum is current and meeting the needs of UTC psychology majors, the department should conduct a review of its course offerings on a regular cycle. During the next curricular review, the faculty is encouraged to critically evaluate course offerings in an effort to “right-size” the curriculum. The department offers a large number of courses for a department of its size. Given enrollment growth projections and limited availability of larger classrooms, the department will likely face challenges offering enough sections of required courses, thereby making it increasingly difficult to offer elective courses that are listed in the course catalog. Reducing elective course offerings and limiting the number of courses that satisfy Line 1, Line 2, and Line 3 requirements will allow for an efficient offering of courses that will minimize the number of course preparations for
departmental faculty. The department should also consider making use of special/selected topics courses in lieu of formally offered courses that are in the catalog.

**Curriculum Content**

- The discipline of Psychology has a tradition of fostering strong critical thinking, methodological, and analytic skills, as well as helping students develop strong oral and written communication skills. The curriculum at UTC appropriately develops these skills across the curriculum, with a particular emphasis in PSY 2010, 2020, 2040, 4010, and in capstone coursework.

**Research and Applied Opportunities**

- Both students and faculty value student participation in research and applied experiences. Students report that they actively seek out these opportunities and that there are many opportunities available for undergraduate students. Exposure to professional opportunities is also provided through coursework including, PSY 4070, Professional Psychology.

**Availability of Courses**

- Table 2 (pp. 18-20 of the Undergraduate Review Portfolio) clearly outlines that required courses are offered on a regular basis. Many courses are offered during both daytime and evening hours in order to accommodate working students. Students reported no difficulty in enrolling in upper-level courses and that department staff were particularly helpful in helping students get into required courses.

**Teaching and Learning Environment**

**Instructional Practices**

- Students report that faculty members are very approachable, have an open door policy, and that they “get to know students on a first name basis.” Students value the diversity of faculty research interests and the number of opportunities that are available to collaborate with faculty on research.
- Student involvement in the life of the program is achieved through student-faculty collaborative research opportunities and through active chapters of Psi Chi and the Society for Human Resource Management.

**Adequacy of Curricular and Career Advising**

- Students report strong satisfaction with academic and professional advising. Despite high advising loads, students report that faculty are good at “sitting down and talking to you” and that they received effective mentoring. Faculty report that they spend 5-10 min with each student and that they would like to be able to devote more time to students for advising. Faculty also requested additional training on advising software and mentoring by senior faculty.

**Adequacy of Library Holdings**

- Library support and holdings appear to be adequate and meeting departmental needs. Resources include electronic access to the standard platform of psychology journals, ILLIAD interlibrary loan support, and a librarian liaison assigned to the department. The library also
provided the department with an $8,000 annual budget to support one-time requests. The new library will open next year and will bring together under one roof a number of student support services (e.g., the writing center, statistical support, student advising, etc.)

**Diversity Efforts**
- The department’s curriculum provides diverse perspectives and experiences through coursework including Psychology of Black Experience, Social Psychology, Psychology of Individual Difference, Psychology of Women, and Psychology of Religion. Additional exposure to diverse perspectives and underrepresented groups may likely be obtained through internship and practica experiences.

**Student Evaluation of Faculty Teaching**
- Students evaluate each course through an online teaching evaluation system. The results of these evaluations are used in the annual review of faculty as part of the EDO review.

**Faculty**

**Adequate Faculty Lines**
- With the addition of two new faculty in the upcoming academic year and the potential to hire an additional faculty member for the IO program, the number of faculty should be adequate to meet the needs of the program. Faculty workload, expressed in terms of student credit hour (SCH) production/FTE exceeds workload at the college and university levels by a substantial percentage. Further enrollment growth or increases in number of majors will require the allocation of additional faculty lines.

**Diversity of Faculty**
- The faculty represent diverse areas of psychology and faculty diversity with respect to gender and ethnicity are typical for the discipline.

**Faculty Credentials**
- Faculty credentials are appropriate to the level of the program and meet SACS guidelines. All tenured/tenure-track faculty hold terminal degrees in Psychology or related disciplines and non-tenure track faculty meet SACS credentialing requirements.
- The diversity of faculty interests and backgrounds is a notable strength of the department. As future hiring occurs, the department should continue to focus on strengthening representation in the core areas of psychology (e.g., cognition, biological bases of behavior, social and personality, and development across the lifespan) in order to meet the needs of undergraduate majors.

**Scholarship and Service**
- Table 7 reports rates of faculty scholarship over the past five years. Psychology faculty generate scholarship at nearly twice the rate of that of faculty in the college and across the university. This is particularly commendable given the high SCH production per FTE in Psychology. Also notable is the increasing success of faculty in obtaining external funding to support their scholarship. Scholarship is distributed across a number of types of activities including peer-review journal articles, conference presentations, grants and grant review
panels, and publication of books and book chapters. The quantity and quality of scholarship and service to the profession that is listed in faculty CVs is very impressive.

- Professional development plans (EDOs) are filed in the department office and are used in annual reviews to enhance faculty performance. The EDO provides evidence as to whether faculty are meeting individual goals set during the annual review with the department head.
- Faculty provide service to UTC and the surrounding community in a number of ways, including student research and practica, service on college and university committees, and presentations to the university and the community. Numerous examples of these types of activities may be found in the faculty CVs.

**Evaluation of Faculty**

- The annual review of teaching, research, and service obligations are provided through the EDO review process. This review incorporates student course evaluations, which are very positive and comparable to college and university ratings, and assessment of quantity and quality of scholarship and service. Overall, there appears to be general satisfaction with the review system.

**Support**

**Evaluation of Equipment and Facilities**

- The department has requested and obtained support to renovate its conference room and has received space for new faculty. Unfortunately, the conference room must be shared with another academic department and new faculty may not be ideally located on campus. It will be important to locate new faculty near existing faculty in order to promote faculty development and collegiality. As space becomes available within Holt Hall, it will be critically important that psychology receives its fair share of the available space. More generally, department faculty or the department head should be involved in broader discussions about university space allocation, particularly as plans are developed to renovate Holt Hall and the old library.

**Adequacy of Resources**

- Program resources are inadequate given the high teaching and scholarly output of the department. The department has lost office space within Holt Hall and has inadequate and often inappropriate research space. The lack of appropriate research space limits the type of research that can be conducted by existing faculty and restricts the type of faculty that can be hired in the future.
- In order to handle increased class size and enrollment growth, additional graduate student support (GAs) is needed to help cover laboratory and general education courses. Increased graduate student support will also lead to stronger programs of research and vertical research teams, which will provide additional opportunities for undergraduate students to become engaged in research.
- Given the small size, yet diverse research interests of the faculty, it is critically important that faculty have the opportunity to meet with researchers in their individual disciplines in order to stay current in their fields. For this reason, increasing funding to support faculty scholarship and travel to professional conferences is the greatly needed.
Faculty and graduate students need appropriate office and research space in order to meet their teaching and research needs. The department head often has difficulty scheduling classes in Holt Hall due to other departments scheduling courses during non-standard meeting times (e.g., one-day per week). This prevents efficient use of space and limits when psychology courses may be offered.

Prioritization of needs:
1. Graduate student support
2. Financial support for scholarship and professional travel
3. Research and office space

It is unclear whether savings could be realized from current program operations given that funding has been flat for five years despite robust enrollment growth. The faculty is generating 36% more credit hours and is serving 35% more undergraduate majors than they were five years ago and is doing so with no new resources.

Adequacy of Operating Budget
- The operating budget meets the basic needs of the department but is insufficient to adequately support faculty scholarship and professional travel. The most pressing needs of the program are:
  1. Additional graduate student support
  2. An additional faculty line to support the IO program
  3. Financial support for scholarship and professional travel
  4. Appropriate research and office space
  5. Technology (computer replacement and a restricted access computer lab)

Enrollment and Graduation Rates
- Enrollment in the undergraduate program is very strong and continues to increase. In fact, the rate of growth may need to be controlled unless additional faculty lines and space become available. Retention and graduation rates are comparable if not somewhat higher than those reported for the college and the university.

Summary Recommendations

The major strengths of the program are its faculty and its students. Despite a flat operating budget, robust enrollment growth, and limited resources, the faculty of the Department of Psychology demonstrates a remarkable commitment to its students. This commitment may be evidenced by positive student evaluations of teaching, high rates of scholarship that frequently involves student authors/presenters, and active service to the university, community, and the profession. Students value the diverse perspectives of faculty, actively seek opportunities to collaborate with faculty on research, and appreciate the openness of faculty and the relationships that they form with them. Overall, the department appears to be highly collegial and well positioned to thrive if provided with sufficient resources.

The major weakness of the program is its resources. The department’s operating budget is a major limiting factor in the department’s ability to be successful. Moreover, space (office, research, and classroom) is limited and there appears to be considerable competition for securing additional space.
Recommended Goals for the Next Five Years

- Critically examine the undergraduate curriculum and streamline course offerings wherever possible. As the department copes with increasing enrollment, reducing the variety of courses offered will allow the faculty to devote its limited resources to the core areas of psychology. This will additionally benefit faculty by reducing the number of course preparations for which faculty are responsible. Specialty courses can be offered through seminars or selected topics courses that would not require a commitment to offering these courses on a regular basis.
- Effectively mentor new faculty. New faculty members need to be mentored by senior faculty and by the department head throughout their first year. Familiarizing new faculty with departmental policies and procedures, thesis supervision, and advising is critical to faculty success and to maintaining a collegial environment. Efforts should be made to limit the number of new course preparations for faculty in their first two years so that they may establish their programs of research and refine their course materials.
- The department has a strong history of involving students in research. Continuing to value the mentoring of students by departmental faculty and graduate students should be a priority for the program.

Achievement of Goals

- The department should consider holding a faculty retreat (supported by the Dean and/or Provost) during which they can work to examine the undergraduate and graduate curriculums to ensure that they are current and contain a manageable variety of courses given current and projected faculty resources.
- Faculty should continue to pursue internal and external funding to support research and travel. Internal funding should be sought from the Provost, who makes available two million dollars per year for faculty development grants. Efforts to obtain external funding should be supported through reassigned time.
- The department head should work with the Dean and Provost to gradually increase faculty support for research and travel. Current funding is inadequate and far below that of peer institutions. $1,400/FTE should be a target for faculty research and travel support.
- Additional graduate student support would benefit faculty scholarship and increase their competitiveness for external funding. Furthermore, graduate teaching assistants are a cost effective method for covering lower-level undergraduate courses and laboratories, thereby allowing faculty greater opportunities to take advantage of reassigned time for scholarship and course buyouts from grants.