

## Review of Graduate Psychology Programs University of Tennessee Chattanooga

### Part I – Learning Outcomes

#### *1. How would you rank this program with similar ones in the state, region, and nation?*

UTC has a strong graduate psychology program that rivals or surpasses comparable psychology programs in the state, the region, and the nation. Both the Industrial-Organizational (I-O) and the Psychological Science (PS) programs offer a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for a career and/or a terminal degree (e.g., PhD).

#### *2. Are the intended program and learning outcomes clearly identified?*

a. Yes, the department has specified program mission, vision, and goal statements for both the I-O and the PS programs. There are clear and appropriate student learning outcomes.

b. There are no suggestions concerning student opportunities in research, practical/field experiences, or placement in the workforce. Current students have numerous opportunities to engage in high-impact experiential learning opportunities at UTC. Students in the PS program conduct research with a faculty mentor, which better prepares them for pursuit of a doctoral degree. Students in the I-O program are able to secure internships/work experiences directly related to their field of study. The I-O program requires that students complete 300 hours of supervised practicum work. This is a major strength of the I-O program.

c. As UTC has been tasked with increasing total enrollment to 14,800 students by 2030, the university will need to ensure there are enough faculty to teach and mentor both undergraduate and graduate students, particularly faculty involved with the PS program. Another important goal is securing more funding for conference travel. Currently, faculty receive \$500 for travel. Unfortunately, this makes attending national conferences difficult as registration alone can be \$200-\$300 (e.g., registration for the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association is close to \$200 for faculty).

#### *3. What criteria does the department use to evaluate sufficient achievement of intended program outcomes? Are the criteria appropriate for such evaluation and/or for the program?*

In addition to 6 general student learning outcomes (SLOs), the I-O program assessment plan is guided by the Society for Industrial and Organization Psychology (SIOP) Guidelines for Graduate Education and Training in I-O Psychology. As noted in the self-study, “Instructors identify one or two of the developed SLO statements for these competencies and engage students to rate their confidence in their ability to do what is outlined in each SLO at the beginning of each course (pre-evaluation) and at the end of each course (a post-evaluation...)”.

Yes, these criteria are appropriate for the I-O program.

The PS program has 5 SLOs: (a) demonstrate core knowledge in Psychology; (b) proficiency in evaluating, designing, and conducting research; (c) proficiency in professional writing and presentations; (d) statistical and methodological proficiency; and (e) professional development. As reported in the self-study, “With respect to knowledge outcomes, the PS program requires students to successfully propose, carry out, and defend an in-depth thesis project under the direction of their faculty mentor and two other graduate-level faculty committee members”. Additionally, “With respect to research competencies, the core competencies of identifying, critically analyzing, and presenting empirical research, as well as developing hypotheses and designing novel research questions and methodologies are learning objectives for every course within our program”. SLOs related to professional communication skills and abilities are incorporated into each course of the PS program. Students are expected to complete a thesis and to teach PSY 5020, which develops students’ communication skills. Finally, professional development is a core tenet of the PS program. By gaining research experience and teaching experience, students that graduate from this program are well prepared to enter a PhD program.

Yes, the criteria for the PS program are appropriate.

***4. Does the department make use of evaluation information and/or information obtained from student, alumni, and employer surveys and/or data from institutional research to strengthen and improve the program?***

Yes. Beginning in 2018, the I-O program began implementing a revised learning outcome evaluation for students. As described briefly above in question 3, students take a pre-test and a post-test related to a few of the SIOP-derived SLOs each semester. The Department of Psychology also has employers complete an evaluation of all students completing a practicum. The I-O program tracks graduate job placement titles and organizations. The PS program keeps track of the trajectory of graduates (e.g., did they seek a PhD or find a job in a field directly related to their graduate work?). Students in both programs can complete course evaluations at the end of each semester for all courses in which they are enrolled.

***5. Does the program fit/align within the institutional mission?***

Yes, the psychology graduate programs align with the institutional mission. The mission statement of UTC is as follows: “The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a driving force for achieving excellence. Our mission is to actively engage students, faculty, and staff; embrace diversity and inclusion; inspire positive change; and enrich and sustain our community”. The graduate programs allow students and faculty to work directly with community partners (particularly the I-O program) or to perform research (primarily the PS program). Diverse perspectives are valued in both programs. Because the I-O students are required to complete 300 practicum hours, they directly benefit the local community. The PS students enrich the community by bringing prestige to UTC through conference presentations and publications in national/international journals.

## **Part II – Curriculum**

1. ***Is the current curriculum appropriate to the level and purpose of a graduate program? Is the program more advanced in academic content when compared to related undergraduate programs?***

Yes, the current curriculum for both the I-O and the PS programs is appropriate for graduate students. These programs are more advanced in academic content compared to the undergraduate program. I-O and PS students are required to take two graduate level statistics courses, and they have the option to complete up to three elective statistics courses. These classes are crucial for preparing students for pursuit of a PhD or pursuit of a career that involves data management and analysis. All students in the PS program are required to take PSY 5020 (Teaching of Psychology). This course allows students to teach a course like PSY 1010 (Introduction to Psychology) after they have completed 18 credit hours of graduate coursework. PS students are also required to complete PSY 5370 (Practicum in Psychology), which provides these students with hands-on experience working with a faculty member. I-O students can also complete PSY 5370, but this is not a required course.

2. ***How has the program designed a process by which students can be assured of making timely progress in the degree program? How is it determined that courses are offered? Is there a set schedule for course offerings upon which the student can rely? Does the department clearly outline program requirements and offer courses regularly to ensure timely completion of the program?***

The curriculum for both programs is well designed to ensure students complete degree requirements in a timely fashion. All first-year students complete the two-semester statistics/research methods sequence (PSY 5100 and PSY 5130). Each program has a detailed curriculum map that shows students which courses to complete each semester. The graduate directors are responsible for determining the curriculum of the I-O and the PS programs. Each director conducts exit interviews with graduate students; during the interview, students are asked how the curriculum prepared (or did not prepare) them for career opportunities. The directors also review the current needs of the field at large. This enables them to determine if current courses will ensure that students are prepared to meet these needs. Yes, the department clearly outlines program requirements, and it offers required courses regularly to ensure timely completion of each program.

3. ***Does the curriculum align with the program learning outcomes? How is mastery assured through the curriculum? How is the content reviewed on a regular basis with results used to determine actions to take to improve the curriculum? Does the department regularly review and revise curriculum content and organization to ensure that it is appropriate and that it prepares students to meet the specified learning outcomes? Will the department need to update the curriculum and/or develop new or alternative offerings in the near future?***

Yes, the curriculum aligns with the program learning outcomes. In the I-O program, there are 6 main SLOs (in addition to the assessment plan guided by SIOP). The SLOs are as follows:

- a. Application of I-O concepts: Students have multiple opportunities to show mastery of this SLO, through courses such as PSY 5120 (Employee Performance and

- Development), PSY 5250 (Business and Analytics skills for I-O Professionals), PSY 5260 (Organizational Development and Change Management), PSY 5400 (Trends and Myths in I-O Psychology Science and Practice), and PSY 5999 (Thesis).
- b. Core knowledge of I-O domain: Mastery is achieved in courses like PSY 5360 (Practicum) and through either the comprehensive exam or PSY 5999.
  - c. Core knowledge of psychological discipline: Mastery is achieved courses like PSY 5360 and through either the comprehensive exam or PSY 5999.
  - d. Proficiency in evaluating, designing, and conducting research: PSY 5999 is appropriate as a course that enables students to show mastery of this SLO.
  - e. Proficiency in professional writing and presentations: Several courses are listed as providing students the opportunity to master this SLO – PSY 5260, PSY 5360, and PSY 5400.
  - f. Statistical and methodological proficiency: This SLO is mastered after taking the PSY 5510/5520 sequence and for students that complete PSY 5999.

The PS program has 5 SLOs (see question 3 of Part I). Mastery of each SLO is demonstrated in PSY 5999, which is required for all PS students. Additionally, mastery of SLO 5 (professional development) can be demonstrated in PSY 5950 and PSY 5960 (Advanced Studies courses).

As described in the previous question, the graduate directors are responsible for determining the curriculum of the I-O and the PS programs. They receive feedback from students, and they keep up with current trends in psychological science to ensure that the courses that are offered are timely and better prepare students for career opportunities. This review is an ongoing process, and there is evidence that the curriculum has been modified throughout the year to meet changing demands.

Overall, no major changes need to be made to the curriculum.

***4. Is the curriculum adequate to enable students to develop the skills and attain the outcomes? Does the curriculum include knowledge of the disciplinary literature?***

Yes, to both questions. Students in both programs acquire crucial statistics and research methods training, and they complete rigorous discipline-specific courses. These courses expose students to scientific literature. Students in the I-O program receive direct training as they must complete 300 practicum hours. Students in the PS program receive direct research training. Students in the PS program also take PSY 5020, which provides them critical experience in college teaching. I-O students also have the option of completing PSY 5020.

***5. Are opportunities available to students that allow them to engage in research, professional practice or training experiences? How are those opportunities communicated to students?***

Yes, there are numerous opportunities for students to engage in research, professional practice, and/or training experiences. All I-O students must complete 300 hours of supervised practicum work. They also have the opportunity to complete a thesis, which allows them to gain research experience. They can also take PSY 5020 to gain training in college teaching. PS students must

take PSY 5020, and they must complete PSY 5370. This provides these students with research experience.

The directors of each graduate program meet with all students individually at least once per semester. Graduate students also attend weekly “brown bag lunches”. These provide opportunities for students to learn about experiential learning opportunities. For I-O students, they are required to complete 300 practicum hours. All PS students must complete research.

***6. Is the program offered through distance education or online? If so, how are those offerings assessed compared to on ground programming?***

No, the program is offered in person.

***7. Are appropriate pedagogical and/or technological innovations included that enhance student learning? Are the department’s instructional practices consistent with the standards of the discipline?***

Yes, to both questions. As described multiple times throughout this document, the 300 practicum hours required of I-O students is a major strength of the I-O program. This gives students experience that is directly applicable to their intended profession. PS students are given opportunities to better prepare themselves for a career in research/academia. They conduct research with a faculty member and complete a thesis project. They also gain valuable knowledge related to pedagogy. These students can also serve as an instructor for PSY 1010.

The instructional practices used by the Department of Psychology are consistent with the standards of organizations such as SIOP and the American Psychological Association.

### **Part III – Student Experience**

***1. Does the program have enough students to allow an appropriate group of peers as they participate in the program?***

Yes. The I-O program typically admits 18-19 students each fall while the PS program has admitted 9 students during the past 3 years. Importantly, first-year students from both graduate programs complete PSY 5100 and PSY 5130 (the statistics/research methods sequence). This provides students from each program to interact with one another, which helps foster a supportive environment.

***2. Are students offered the opportunity to evaluate both the curriculum and the faculty? How? Are these methods effective in getting feedback about the program and teaching effectiveness?***

Yes. Students complete evaluations at the end of each semester for each course in which they are enrolled. Course evaluation data were not included in the self-study, so determination of the effectiveness of these evaluations cannot be performed. In 2024, both graduate programs began conducting interviews with students that entered the program and with students that exited the

program. The self-study did mention that I-O students often comment on the “positive, open-door culture that [faculty] maintain when it comes to sharing feedback and ideas for program improvement with program faculty”. Students in each program have two individual meetings with Dr. Cunningham (I-O director) or Dr. Shelton (PS director) twice per year.

**3. *Are there appropriate curricular and co-curricular offerings to enhance student experiences?***

Yes. The courses offered to students in both the I-O and the PS programs are rigorous, requiring students to master statistical concepts, research methodology, and discipline-specific skills. I-O graduate students gain real-world experience by completing 300 hours of practicum work. PS students gain direct research training and are required to complete Teaching of Psychology.

**4. *Are diverse perspectives and experiences provided for the students both through the curriculum and through extracurricular activities?***

In the I-O program, students are provided diverse perspectives and experiences by completing the practicum requirement. By completing Teaching of Psychology, PS students can gain diverse perspectives on pedagogy and how to teach diverse student populations. Because students from each program take PSY 5100 and PSY 5130 together, this helps bring students together that have diverse interests. In addition to the curriculum, the peer mentoring program allows first-year students to receive mentoring from a second-year student. Also, the alumni mentoring program enables second-year students to be matched with an alumna/alumnus that works in an area directly related to the second-year student’s interests.

**5. *Are students provided with appropriate academic support services? What services are offered? Do students use the services? How well do they meet the needs of the students?***

Yes, students have access to appropriate academic support services. The library makes available over 120,000 journal titles. Directly related to psychology, the library makes available 531 print journals, 5,900 electronic journals, and 55 electronic conference proceedings. Students have access to over 1 million books/monographs, with over 90,000 books (both print and electronic) being related to psychology. In the event a student cannot access a journal article or book on campus, they can use the library interlibrary loan service. The library’s Instruction Team can provide instruction on effective research skills. One strength is that the library designates a liaison for each individual department. Additional library resources include the Studio, the Writing and Communication Center, and the Special Collections team. The library also provides ample classroom space and instructional learning technologies to help students.

The Department of Psychology also has multiple lab spaces that allow students, particularly PS students, to conduct research.

**Part IV – Graduate Faculty Quality**

1. ***Are the faculty competencies/qualifications those needed by the program and by UTC? Do all graduate faculty meet the standards set by the program and expected SACSCOC faculty credentials?***

Yes, to both questions.

2. ***Are faculty teaching loads sufficiently reasonable and equitable to accommodate the highly individualized nature of a graduate program, especially the direction of theses or dissertations?***

No. There are five full-time faculty devoted to the I-O program, which has almost 40 students. If these faculty taught graduate courses only, the teaching load would be more reasonable. However, faculty often teach both undergraduate and graduate courses and/or mentor both undergraduate and graduate students. The I-O program does allow students to take a comprehensive exam in place of a thesis. As 90% of I-O students opt to take the comprehensive exam, this helps decrease the workload of graduate I-O faculty. Although the enrollment of the PS program is considerably lower than the I-O program, and there are more faculty that teach in this program compared to the I-O program (10 vs. 5 faculty), the PS faculty teach and mentor undergraduate students. This is a challenge as enrollment of the undergraduate program continues to increase (over 20% increase in enrollment from the previous 5-year review to the current 5-year review).

3. ***With respect to ethnicity, gender, and academic background, is faculty diversity appropriate for the program? Does the program student and faculty diversity mirror the demographics of the discipline?***

There is little ethnic diversity in the graduate faculty. Out of the 15 faculty listed as contributing to the graduate programs, 13 are White. There is a near equivalent number of men and women that contribute to the graduate programs. The faculty have diverse academic backgrounds, which allows each program to offer courses that span the major domains of I-O psychology or psychology as a whole (PS program).

The student/faculty diversity mostly mirrors the demographics of the discipline. Racial and ethnic diversity in Psychological Science is largely lacking.

4. ***Do the faculty have regular opportunities for professional development such as travel and participation in professional organizations, workshops, and other learning experiences? Do faculty take advantage of the opportunities provided?***

Yes, to both questions. Despite a limited travel budget, faculty travel to conferences to disseminate their work. As noted in the self-study, "The department also attempts to support as fully as possible (from other parts of the operating budget) faculty travel to one national conference per year". Also, faculty routinely seek professional development opportunities that are offered by the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning.

**5. *Are faculty engaged in the planning, assessment, and improvement processes that measure and advance student success?***

This information was not discussed in detail in the graduate self-study. The self-study discussed the Evaluation and Development by Objectives (EDO) process (see next question for more details). Students in the graduate program complete evaluations of the faculty each semester. This allows faculty to determine if changes need to be made to their lectures, class discussions, and/or assessments. While Drs. Cunningham and Shelton are primarily responsible for overseeing the I-O and the PS programs, they collaborate with faculty in the department to determine if changes need to be made to either program. There is sufficient evidence that both programs have been revised over the years to ensure student success (Tables C1 and D1 of the self-study).

**6. *Does the program use assessment data, etc. to improve teaching, scholarship and creative activity and service? How does this work? Are the processes effective?***

Yes. As described in the self-study:

“Overall performance for all full-time faculty within the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is evaluated annually through the Evaluation and Development by Objectives (EDO) process. The EDO process involves two steps: 1) faculty describe a set of objectives around their teaching, research, and service activities during the coming year, and 2) faculty self-evaluate their performance by discussing achievement of their teaching, research and service objectives.”

The department head reviews each step listed above.

Pre-tenure-track faculty are evaluated during an annual reappointment review. These faculty are also evaluated by a RTP committee during their third year. UTC now utilizes post-tenure review.

These processes appear to be effective as faculty have fully met or exceeded EDO expectations. Faculty have been successful achieving tenure and promotion.

**Part V – Learning Resources**

**1. *Does the program regularly evaluate its equipment and facilities and pursue necessary improvements?***

Yes. One discussion point that was raised is that although the current space devoted to the Department of Psychology (third floor of 540MC) is currently adequate, there is little space to accommodate any growth in faculty numbers. If the goal is to increase student enrollment, additional faculty will be needed to service a larger student population. With plans to renovate 540MC, one suggestion is to expand the Department of Psychology to the south side of the third floor. Currently, laboratory spaces are intermixed with faculty offices. Ideally, laboratories would be located outside of the faculty office suite. The south side of the third floor could be devoted to laboratory space while the current space could be used exclusively for faculty offices and student lounges/study spaces.



2. *Are library holdings and other learning and information resources current and adequate to support the teaching and learning needs of the discipline? Are there resources adequate to support the research and publication needs of the faculty and staff?*

Yes, see the response to question 5 of Part III. Additionally, the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning provides faculty “instruction and consultation in the areas of teaching, learning, and technology integration”.

The department also has all the statistical software needed to perform all analyses, and it has sufficient computer resources to support faculty and student research.

## **Part VI – Support**

1. *Is the program’s operating budget consistent with the needs of the program?*

No. As noted in the self-study, neither graduate program has its own budget, which makes “planning for recruitment initiatives challenging”. As written in the self-study, the lack of a dedicated budget for the graduate programs has negatively impacted the department’s ability to “forecast GA allocations to students within [the] program”.

2. *Does the program have a history of enrollment and graduation rates sufficient to sustain high quality and cost effectiveness?*

Yes, enrollment for both the I-O and the PS programs have been largely consistent during the past 5 years. The graduation rate for each program is high.

3. *Is the program responsive to local, state, regional and national needs of the discipline?*

Yes. At the local level, graduate students that complete PSY 5020 can serve as instructors, which directly impacts undergraduate students at UTC. The River Cities Industrial-Organizational (RICO) Psychology Conference is an annual meeting held in Chattanooga, which brings individuals from across the region and the country to the local community. Because students in the I-O program complete 300 practicum hours, they are able to work directly with companies/agencies in the community. Faculty that teach in both the I-O and the PS programs are prolific scholars, disseminating their work at local, regional, and national conferences. Their work is also published in manuscripts that are read by individuals from across the country and from around the world.

4. *Does the program regularly and systematically collect data related to the success of its graduates, including placement? Do they also incorporate the results of that data to inform program improvements?*

Yes, to both questions. Dr. Cunningham documents job placements for I-O graduates. A representative list was provided in Table 1.1 of the self-study. Likewise, Dr. Shelton documents PhD/career placements for PS graduates. A representative list was provided in Table 1.3 of the

self-study. This information allows Drs. Cunningham and Shelton to assess the curriculum of the I-O and the PS programs.

**5. *Are the program policies reviewed on a regular basis to ensure alignment with institutional policies and mission?***

Yes. As noted in the self-study, “all students in [both graduate] programs submit a Program of Study or have an updated online MyMocsDegree profile by the end of their first semester”. The program directors monitor each student’s plan. Both programs also “adhere to all institutional policies regarding admission and management of graduate student progress toward graduation”.

**6. *Considering current budget constraints, what are the most pressing resource needs of the program?***

a. As discussed in question 1 of Part V, the current space devoted to the Department of Psychology is at full capacity. As noted in the self-study, “There are no dedicated offices that I-O or PS graduate students can call their own either collectively or individually”. With the planned renovation to the 540MC building, expanding the Department of Psychology to the southside of the building will enable graduate students to have their own office space. This will also allow for research space to be separated from faculty offices.

b. With the state of Tennessee setting an aggressive enrollment increase to 14,800 students by 2030, the department will need faculty/staff resources to accommodate undergraduate students (800+ students and rising) and graduate students (50+ students). Because many faculty teach both undergraduate and graduate courses and mentor undergraduate and graduate students in research, larger enrollments (especially at the undergraduate level) will make teaching/mentoring of students more difficult.

## **Part VII – Summary Recommendations**

**1. *Overall, what are your impressions of the program?***

Major strengths: Both the I-O and the PS programs offer students a rigorous curriculum that better prepares them for career opportunities and/or pursuing a doctoral degree immediately after graduating. The 300 required practicum hours for the I-O program is a major strength. Students in the PS program receive research training that makes them highly competitive for PhD programs. Having these students complete PSY 5020 is innovative, as students pursuing the PhD most likely will end up in academia, in which teaching is required.

As stated in the review for the undergraduate program, the faculty in the Department of Psychology are highly involved in service activities that benefit UTC, the profession of psychological science, and the community.

Weaknesses: There are no major weaknesses to the program itself. One major challenge facing the Department of Psychology is that current space devoted to the department is at maximum capacity. Students conduct research in labs that are mixed with faculty offices.

**2. What goals would you suggest the program set for the next five years? Please list goals in order of priority (i.e., the most important goal first, followed by the second most important goal, etc.)**

*Two of the goals listed below cannot be addressed by the program alone. These goals will need to be supported by upper administration for them to be met. These goals are nearly identical to the goals described for the undergraduate program.*

Goal 1: With two faculty retiring in 2025 and the addition of two new faculty, the department will still have 22 full-time faculty for the 2025-2026 academic year. To ensure the continued success of the department during the next 5 years (and beyond), upper administration needs to commit to increasing the number of faculty of this department. Ideally, the department should have 28-29 full-time faculty to teach close to 900 undergraduate majors and 50+ graduate students.

Goal 2: This goal is directly related to the first goal and was discussed in question 1 of Part V. With the planned renovation of 540MC, this provides an opportunity to expand the size of the psychology department. As discussed above, current labs are intermixed with faculty offices. This is not ideal as the noise coming from laboratory spaces could interfere with the work faculty are trying to perform in their offices. By expanding the department to the south side of 540MC, this will allow for more dedicated research space.

Goal 3: If the department is able to hire new faculty during the next 5 years, current faculty will need to strategically evaluate the needs of the department. Is there demand to hire an individual that specializes in Human Factors for the I-O program or a comparative psychologist for the PS program? One comment that was raised by the graduate students is that they would like to see a cross-cultural psychology course offered. Only the current department can determine which faculty lines they need to pursue.

**3. How can the program work to achieve these goals over the next five years?**

As stated above, there will need to be considerable collaboration between the department (particularly the department chair) and the Dean of Arts and Sciences and the Provost to meet goals 1 and 2. The department will be able to have conversations regarding need and demand, which will influence decisions regarding faculty hires.