**Psychological Science Assessment Feedback: Fall 2011**

**Department Liaison and Primary Reader:** Jeremy Osborn

**Secondary Readers:** Drew Dunham, Cheryl Blackwell

**Summary**: The Psychological Science Department continues to follow the extensive assessment plan they outlined in 2009 and recently overhauled their curriculum, in part, in response to assessment data. The curricular changes were described extensively in an addendum to the 2009 report, and were approved by C&RC in 2010. In terms of the plan, the department outlined eight learning goals. Each goal was linked directly to several specific classes. The primary assessment instrument is the ETS Major Field Test, which is administered every year to graduating seniors. A blind review of student writing is also used. The department submitted updates in 2010 and 2011 with no major changes to primary assessment instruments. Data from the Major Field Test have been collected each year and provided to the assessment committee. In their 2011 update, the department discussed the development of a senior exit survey, to be administered to future classes and also discussed the fact that the impact of the 2010 curricular changes will not be fully realized until 2013-2014, when the first class operating under the new guidelines graduates.

**Observations:** As discussed in the 2009 feedback, your assessment plan is designed well, overall. Measures and results are explained clearly and specific courses are tied to each learning goal in a clear manner. One area of potential weakness involves the heavy reliance on the Major Field Test. Use of this test limits primary assessment to graduating seniors. As discussed in your rationale for curricular changes, the major coursework in the department is designed in such a way that upper division courses build on the knowledge base created in lower division courses. Assessment is most effective and has the most applied value when it cuts across all levels of the curriculum. It is not clear that the current assessment plan, in spite of its strengths and level of specificity, is necessarily reflecting knowledge acquisition and learning progress for students prior to senior year. It is also not clear from the 2010 and 2011 updates that the department has addressed the self-described deficiency in the Major Field Test in the area of assessing the ability of students to analyze empirical findings.

**Recommendations:** Your plan is strong, overall, and the use of an external, national assessment test is always desirable. We would, however, encourage you to examine your quantitative measures and qualitative indicators for their ability to assess learning prior to senior year and consider possibly using additional measures such as embedded questions or assignments to collect this data. This diversity in general would be a benefit, as the strongest assessment plans are the ones that take advantage of multiple types of direct and indirect indicators. In addition, one of the strengths of the new curriculum appears to be the set of List 3 courses that help students “translate thought to action.” Given that this was mentioned in the rationale you sent to C&RC, it seems like an area that should also be considered in your assessment plan. Is there a measure that can be added that assesses the extent to which students are developing that ability? Is it already encapsulated in the critical thinking learning goal? Is it measured in some way by the Major Field Test? Some clarity in this area would help. Finally, we look forward to seeing reports on your senior exit survey and your analysis of the impact of curricular changes in proceeding years.

Our thanks to the Psychological Science faculty, students, and staff for the time, energy, and collaborative labor that went into assessment efforts within the program.

Please contact your Assessment Committee liaison Jeremy Osborn if you have follow-up questions, comments, or concerns.