

Psychology Student Learning Assessment Plan*

1. **Mission Statement.** This section includes a brief description of the program's mission and focus and of how program learning goals relate in general to the missions of the program and of the college.

The mission of the psychology department at Juniata College is to offer an education that exposes students to both the breadth and depth of modern psychological science. We emphasize the scientific study of behavior and mental processes in order to both understand and improve the world we live in. We strive to offer our students quality classroom instruction, hands-on research, and internship opportunities. In service of this mission, the psychology department has adopted the ten goals for undergraduate education recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA). We have identified Goals 1, 2, 3 & 7 as direct goals, meaning that they represent the major focus of our curriculum and assessment efforts, and we have direct measures of student learning for these goals. Goals 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, & 10 are indirect goals, meaning that they are not the major focus of our curriculum and we do not have direct measures of student learning on these goals. The 10 APA goals are:

- **Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology.** Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.
- **Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology.** Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
- **Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology.** Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.
- **Goal 4: Application of Psychology.** Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.
- **Goal 5: Values in Psychology.** Students will be able to weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline.
- **Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy.** Students will demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes.
- **Goal 7: Communication Skills.** Students will be able to communicate effectively in a variety of formats.

- **Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness.** Students will recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity.
- **Goal 9: Personal Development.** Students will develop insight into their own and others' behavior and mental processes and apply effective strategies for self-management and self-improvement.
- **Goal 10: Career Planning and Development.** Students will emerge from the major with realistic ideas about how to implement their psychological knowledge, skills, and values in occupational pursuits in a variety of settings.

*Goals taken from: American Psychological Association. (2007). *APA guidelines for the undergraduate psychology major*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from www.apa.org/ed/resources.html

These goals directly relate to the institutional mission by helping students to develop “the ability to read with insight, to use language clearly and effectively, and to think analytically.” Our mission and goals help to provide students with “the fundamental methods and purposes of academic inquiry.” Both of these quotes are from the Juniata College mission statement. Our program helps build these fundamental skills so that students have the knowledge and skill necessary to become life-long learners.

2. **Student Learning Outcomes.** Student Learning Outcomes are statements of what you intend students “to know, do, and care about” after successfully completing your program. Think in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, etc. What kinds of discipline-based knowledge should students develop in the program? What are the skills (lab, communication, technical, computer, etc.) that the graduates should have acquired? What kinds of attributes should the students develop (appreciation for diversity, understanding learning styles, etc.) during the program of study? Briefly describe the process for developing student learning goals and how they relate to institutional goals.

Since our assessment tools and methods are linked with our SLOs, both are presented together in the next section. However, we assess more than just SLOs. Student feedback is also collected in a senior exit survey and an alumni survey. These surveys primarily ask students to reflect upon their time at Juniata and diagnose areas of strength as well as those that need improvement.

3. **Assessment Tools and Methods.** Next, each program will identify or create appropriate assessment tools and methods for gathering evidence regarding student learning. Effective assessment programs entail a combination of direct and indirect measures and may include both quantitative and qualitative information. Assessment tools include tests, portfolios, course-embedded measures, capstone evaluations, and others. In addition, this section should describe why particular measures were chosen, and how, when, and by whom they will be administered.

Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.

SLO: Students will be able to answer content questions about the major content areas within the field of psychology (Abnormal Psychology, Learning & Conditioning, Development, Cognition, Biopsychology, and Social Psychology).

Teaching Methods: All psychology POEs are required to take at least four courses out of the five major content areas (Abnormal Psychology, Learning & Conditioning, Development, Cognition, Biopsychology, and Social Psychology). These courses will include readings, lectures, projects, and assessments designed to develop and test student mastery of the relevant content material.

Assessment: Each senior Psychology POE will take the Psychology Area Concentration Achievement Test (PACAT). This is a nationally normed test and we receive percentile scores to compare our students with similar students nationally. The PACAT provides separate sections and scores for each of the 5 major areas listed above. All senior psychology students are required to take this assessment in a senior capstone. We expect all students to have a minimum overall score at or above the 25th percentile. We expect our departmental average for all students to be at or above the 50th percentile. This assessment is given by the instructor of Senior Capstone.

Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology. Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.

SLO1: Students will be able to answer conceptual and applied questions about research methods and statistics.

SLO2: Students will be able to accurately identify and interpret key aspects of research methodology and statistical analysis while reading an empirical psychology article.

SLO3: Students will be able to accurately create and interpret a research study with hypothetical results to test a hypothesis.

Teaching Methods: All psychology POEs are required to take Statistics for the Social Sciences (NDSS214) and Research Methods (PY309). These courses will include readings, lectures, projects, and assessments designed to develop and test student mastery of research methods and statistics.

Assessment SLO1: All students will take the Psychology Area Concentration Achievement Test (PACAT) in the senior capstone. Scores on the PACAT subsections of Experimental Design and Statistics will be used to assess SLO1. This assessment is administered by the instructor of Senior Capstone.

Assessment SLO2 & SLO3: All students in Research Methods (PY309) will complete a graded assessment at the conclusion of PY309 designed to evaluate SLO1 and SLO2. All sections of PY309 will utilize the same assessment tool in any given year. This assessment is given by the instructors of Research Methods.

Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology. Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.

SLO1-3: Since critical thinking is evidence-based reasoning using the appropriate methodological means, all three SLOs and assessments identified under Goal 2 are also

subsumed under Goal 3. Research methods and statistics cover the methodological means by which psychology evaluates the evidence for behavioral claims.

SLO4: Students will be able to accurately evaluate behavioral claims found in popular press and peer-reviewed articles.

SLO5: Students will be able to accurately diagnose problems in novice designed research studies.

Teaching Methods: In addition to the teaching methods listed under Goal 3, *all* psychology courses involve the coverage of evaluating behavioral claims based on evidence. Our department (and our field) emphasizes a methodological approach to evaluated behavioral claims in every course.

Assessment SLO4 & SLO5: We have created an assessment (the Psychological Critical Thinking Inventory) designed to measure the development of critical thinking in our students. This assessment will be administered periodically to students in Introduction to Psychology and in our Senior Capstone to evaluate student development. We expect students in Senior Capstone to score significantly higher than students in Introduction to Psychology. This assessment is given by the instructors for Introduction to Psychology and Senior Capstone.

Goal 4: Application of Psychology. Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.

Psychology is inherently an applied science and all of our courses deal with the application of psychology. We believe that this goal is already addressed in Goals 1 and 2 and 3.

Goal 5: Values in Psychology. Students will be able to weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline.

The major values of psychology include those of a scientific worldview. We believe that this goal is already addressed in Goals 2 and 3 above.

Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy. Students will demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes.

Information and technological literacy is addressed and assessed across our curriculum. Statistical software is used by all students in NDSS214. Successful completion of this course demonstrates a basic level of proficiency. Use of PsycINFO is required in PY309. All students are required to use PowerPoint in PY415 (capstone).

Goal 7: Communication Skills. Students will be able to communicate effectively in a variety of formats.

SLO: Students will be able to write a full-length APA paper that includes all major sections of a typical empirical psychology paper.

Teaching Methods: All psychology POEs are required to take Research Methods in Psychology (PY309) and complete a full-length APA paper. As a CW designated course, writing goals are included in the syllabus and in the course content. A grading rubric will be provided for all students at the beginning of the course. Students will complete two individual papers and will have a chance to rewrite the second paper after receiving

feedback. All psychology POEs are required to take PY415 (Psychology Capstone) which is a CS course.

Assessment: Grades on the first paper will be compared with grades on the final paper using a rubric. All sections of PY309 will use the same rubric. All students are expected to improve and have a passing grade (> 60%) on the final paper. This assessment is administered by the instructors of Research Methods. A rubric will be used to assess oral presentations in PY415.

Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness. Students will recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity.

Goal 8 is an indirect goal for our psychology department. While it is addressed in some of our courses it is not directly assessed.

Goal 9: Personal Development. Students will develop insight into their own and others' behavior and mental processes and apply effective strategies for self-management and self-improvement.

Goal 9 is an indirect goal for our psychology department. While it is addressed in some of our courses it is not directly assessed.

Goal 10: Career Planning and Development. Students will emerge from the major with realistic ideas about how to implement their psychological knowledge, skills, and values in occupational pursuits in a variety of settings.

Goal 10 is an indirect goal for our psychology department. While it is addressed in some of our courses it is not directly assessed. This goal is primarily addressed through student mentorship and advising.

4. **Time line for Implementation.** Each program will identify a realistic timeframe for implementation of the assessment plan. Will a pilot of tools and methods be conducted, if so when? When will data be collected and the results analyzed? [In order to meet the progress timeline for the Middle States Periodic Review Report, programs should plan to start gathering assessment data no later than **Fall 2009.**]

Our timeline for collection is listed in the table under question 5.

5. **Analysis of Results.** Following the collection of data, the program will need to carefully analyze the results. Who will conduct the analysis? How will the results be shared with the faculty? What types of thresholds and comparisons will be used?

The instructor of record for each course will conduct the assessments built into their course. They will provide this assessment data to the chair of the department for each student in their class. The chair will designate one member of the department to write a report at the end of each year summarizing the main findings. This summary report will be posted on our shared department faculty drive so that all psychology faculty will have access to it.

Goal (Assessor)	Assessment Tool	Assessment Cycle	Performance Goal
Knowledge base (instructor of PY415)	PACAT 5 major areas described above.	Yearly	All students will achieve at least a 25 th percentile overall score. Across all students, the department will have at least a 50 th percentile score for each subsection.
Research Methods (instructors of PY309)	PACAT subsections on Experimental Design and Statistics.	Yearly	Same criteria as above.
	Common exam component	Yearly	All students will earn at least 50% of the available points.
Critical Thinking (Instructors of PY101 and PY415)	In addition to those listed under Goal 2, the PCTI will be administered to students in Intro. Psych and Senior Capstone	At least once every five years.	Students in Senior Capstone will score significantly higher than students in Intro. Psychology.
Communication (Instructors of PY309)	Rubric to assess APA paper. Rubric to assess oral presentation in PY415.	Yearly	Students will perform better on the final version of paper 2 than they did on paper 1. All students will have a passing grade on the final paper and oral presentation (>60).
Student Satisfaction (Widman & McLaughlin)	Senior Survey	Yearly	Data will be summarized and compared with prior years.
Student Satisfaction (Widman & McLaughlin)	Alumni Survey	At least once every five year.	Data will be summarized and compared with prior years.

6. **Program for Improvement.** The goal of assessment is to improve student learning, and thus, the critical step in improving student learning is to use the results of assessment to make changes to the curriculum, course exercises, and activities. Identify the strategies that the program will use to link the analysis of results to program improvements.

At the end of every academic year assessment data will be compiled. Phil Dunwoody will compile the data on the SLOs. Ron McLaughlin and David Widman will compile data on the

Senior Survey and the Alumni Survey. Each of the above responsible parties will submit a summary of their assessment to the department chair. We will begin each year by discussing the assessment findings for the prior year. Any performance goals that fall below our expectations will be discussed. The chair will then write an overall summary highlighting any important findings and summarizing any plan of action developed by the Psychology department faculty to address issues of concern. This yearly assessment will be stored on our Psychology department shared drive. As part of our APAC review, we will include this assessment data.

*Sources: *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003); *Student Outcomes Assessment Plan* (Indiana State University, 1995); Barbara E. Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education* (Jossey-Bass, 2004).