

Data-Based Decisions in Psychology

Assessment Outcomes and Changes in the Undergraduate Program

The undergraduate program steering committee has implemented the following program changes and improvements as a result of ongoing assessment activities. In approximately 2000, Skill Tracks within the major were outlined, based on feedback from post-graduation evaluation forms from students, and reviews of areas where there were significant job opportunities. Also, recent data suggest that the academic advisement office has been providing students with more specific information about practicum and research opportunities with faculty, due to both student and faculty input suggesting that some students were not aware of the need for involvement in such opportunities until their senior year. The number of undergraduates involved in faculty research has increased 25% since 2000. Several courses have been redesigned in the past few years to improve students' mastery and learning. These changes came about as a result of faculty assessing students' learning via examinations, and student teaching evaluation forms. For example, the Statistics 2800 course was redesigned by Renee Gallaher in 2001 and 4 years prior to this, by Grayson Osborne, who introduced basic mastery of SPSS software as a requirement. The Psychology 3660, Educational Psychology course has been improved in several ways: 1) more permanent assignment of the class to particular instructors to maintain consistency; 2) increased relevance of the course content for elementary and special education teaching majors (student evaluation feedback to instructors). It is expected that increasing the entering GPA from 2.50 to 2.75 in the coming semester will increase the quality of psychology majors; in turn, this should help faculty cover some materials in more depth/breadth for our majors, because students in their classes should be brighter, more motivated to learn, and overall, better students

Assessment Outcomes and Changes in the M.S. Program in School Counseling

The major changes in the program that have led to enhanced learning in this program occurred when the department made the decision in 1997 to make this program a completely distance education program, funded solely from the tuition it generated. Since that time, the program has grown steadily, so that presently, it enrolls over 80 students statewide. Also, this change allowed all of the courses to be designed for the school counseling profession per se. (Formerly, the courses generically served the Combined Ph.D. program, and both M.S. programs.) Thus, significant revisions of the Introduction to School Counseling, Professional Issues and Ethics, and Introduction to Counseling and Psychotherapy courses have made the curriculum much more relevant to the work of school counselors and to bring them into line with state training standards (2003). Student evaluations of courses have documented the wisdom of making this change (i.e., students no longer complain that the content of some of these classes is of questionable relevance). Students also report that they are more prepared to take on the demands of their practicum experiences because their prior course work is directly relevant. Additionally, since 2000, the program began hiring the top leaders in the state in the area of school counseling to teach 2-3 of the critical professional courses (i.e., Introduction to School Counseling, Professional Issues/Ethics in School Counseling). Universally, students have applauded the increased specificity and relevance of content of these particular courses, because their instructors work full time in the schools or for the State Office of Education. Informal data shared with the Department Head from the State Office of Education suggest that USU graduates are being increasingly "preferred" over the graduates of other programs (e.g., U of Utah, University of Phoenix), because their training is highly relevant to the job role of school counselors.

Curriculum design changes are being continually discussed by the program faculty, as a result of statewide meetings of program chairs at universities who offer training in school counseling, and the Utah State Office of Education. For example, in the near future, programs

will be expected to improve their curriculum in the area of elementary school counseling. Also, student and practicum/internship supervisor evaluation feedback suggests that our students need more instruction in the art of presenting mini-lessons in class on mental health topics, as well as improved educational technology skills. The program is presently looking at ways to implement these additions to the curriculum.

Assessment Outcomes and Changes in the M.S. School Psychology Program

There have not been any significant program revisions since the semester conversion. Faculty continue to implement program and course changes as reflected in the National Association of School Psychology (NASP) accreditation standards. Faculty who teach in the program have noted numerous, minor revisions in course content, so as to make the overall program meet the needs of graduates. Increasingly, the program is incorporating mental health, behavior disorder assessment and treatment content. Course grades document the fact that students are learning these skills, and practicum and internship evaluations suggest that USU's students are prized for possessing these skills.

Assessment Outcomes and Changes in the Ph.D. Program in Research and Evaluation Methodology (recently renamed Experimental and Applied Psychological Science)

Comprehensive, systematic evaluations of the Research and Evaluation Methodology Program are conducted periodically, as evidenced by the evaluation being conducted during the 2001/02 year under the direction of Dr. George Julnes. In addition, a student representative from the REM Program participates regularly in faculty meetings where concerns from other students can be raised and discussed. Finally, student evaluations are completed for all courses in the program each time they are taught. Based on this data, a number of changes have been made during the last seven years. For example:

A weakness was identified with regard to course work in advanced multivariate analysis and psychometric techniques. In response, a new faculty position was created, and a faculty member with expertise in this area was hired. Two new courses (Psych 7070 and 7080), required by all REM students, were added to the doctoral program in approximately 2000..

To ensure that core competencies were being mastered by students early in their program, requirements were added for students to demonstrate instrumentation development and computer analysis competencies as a part of the masters degree requirements.

Several years ago, program faculty recognized that procedures for monitoring student progress and assisting students in completing their program in a timely manner were insufficient. Therefore, procedures were implemented for a written annual review of all students in the program. This review is based on a written assessment from each of the students and faculty discussion and analysis. Results are communicated to students individually.

Student concerns about the lack of information regarding job opportunities, program information, and information about faculty activities led to the creation of a web site which is continually updated.

Confusion about the differences between the Research and Evaluation Methodology Program in the Psychology Department and the Research and Evaluation Program in the College's Interdepartmental Doctoral Program led to closer integration of these two programs in 2000-2001. Now, both programs are administered by a single program management team, which processes admissions for both programs and reviews and makes recommendations concerning curriculum. In addition, students from both programs attend the REM Program Seminar.

Information from periodic comprehensive evaluations, input from students via the student representative, results of course evaluations, and activities of the program management team are all used to regularly review the curriculum. This process has led to better integration of the analysis, measurement, and design skills in two core courses (Psych/Educ 6600 and 6610), addition of new courses for multivariate and advanced psychometric techniques (Psych 7070 and 7080), and creation of a new REM Program Seminar course. The recent conversion to a semester system from the quarter system also prompted a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the curriculum. The complete curriculum for the REM program is reviewed on an annual basis by the faculty and program management team, and adjustments are made as required. Student course evaluations are an integral part of this process. In addition, when each student completes the doctoral program, his/her advisor is encouraged to discuss the student's experiences in the program and suggestions for program improvement. This information is used in subsequent faculty and program management team meetings to refine and improve program offerings.

Assessment Outcomes and the Combined Clinical/Counseling School Ph.D. Program

This program, accredited by the American Psychological Association, undergoes a very rigorous self-study and 2-day site visit by external reviewers every 5 years. The last re-accreditation occurred in 2005. Several recent program changes have been based on program evaluation activities. First, faculty recently recognized a problem with standardizing the evaluations of one of the capstone requirements of the program—the clinical case presentation. A standard evaluation form has now been developed. This form should help faculty give more comprehensive feedback to the student across a variety of areas. It also identifies for students key areas in which they need to demonstrate expertise. A similar case presentation form is being developed in the School Psychology program, which has a similar requirement.

Second, the program instituted a mid-semester evaluation of practicum, rather than relying on end-of-semester feedback. Adding one evaluation period allows timely feedback to students regarding any problem they need to remediate. This increases the likelihood of positive educational outcomes and overall success in the program.

Third, in addition to grades, each doctoral student receives a comprehensive annual evaluation with feedback. Historically, the yearly evaluation process has been geared toward feedback, but is increasingly being used as an advisement meeting. Students and faculty are now beginning to work together to create a student portfolio that will better position them to get the internships and jobs they desire. The annual evaluations represent a good example of an evaluation process that isn't focused on problems, but on showcasing students' strengths and helping them develop a professional identity.