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EXTERNAL REVIEW OF USFSP PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

The USFSP Psychology department is thriving in its level of collegiality, opportunities for faculty development, support of junior faculty, and commitment to student success and to community engagement. Under the guidance of their chair, Dr. James McHale, the department has assembled a group of scholars and teachers who complement each other and have a common core of goals. The Psychology department has accomplished a lot with limited resources. For example, there are only 8 faculty members (seven tenure track and one visiting assistant professor) to teach approximately 400 majors in their undergraduate and graduate programs. It should also be noted that department has the highest SCHs and largest class size of any degree program. The latter is a concern when considering the USFSP goals of maintaining "a close-knit, student-centered learning community". In our response to the Dean we have suggested the addition of two additional lines (one tenure track and one instructor track) in order to promote this type of learning community and facilitate growth of the two new Masters programs.

The psychology department embodies the principles set forth not only in their own Mission Statement and ALC (see reviewers' response to Dean's question 1), but also those of the College and presented in its Mission Statement. Through their focus on quantitative coursework, writing, critical thinking, and undergraduate research, the department prepares students well for graduate or professional schools. Through their research focused on applied issues and their coursework focused on diversity they provide their students with a broad outlook and a civic awareness. In addition to the above, their promotion of undergraduate research and the creation of two Masters programs suggests that the faculty take seriously the goal that psychology students be recognized as citizen scholars. Below I outline my specific observations and suggestions for continuing development of this thriving department.

<u>**Faculty Research and Research Facilities**</u>

1. Given the research productivity of faculty (1.5 publications per year), their engagement of undergraduate students in research (which is a goal of both the college and the department), and their two new graduate programs, the department is in need of additional lab space that can support both faculty and student research. This is especially important given the Experimental Psychology MA track, in which quantitative skills will be highlighted and data collection necessary.

2. Related to space requirements of the two new Masters programs, our visit highlighted the need for graduate student space. This space is needed not only conduct research, but for students to meet and work outside class. Specifically, students need a place to study, collaborate on research and course projects, hold graduate club meetings and readings, mentor and engage undergraduate students, and hold office hours if working as TAs. At the moment there is no space for students to meet outside of their classes. Space with a

seminar table that can seat 12 people, computer work stations, a printer, and lockable storage would be ideal.

3. Also during our visit the faculty made a strong case for the development of an "Institute for the Promotion of Psychological Resilience" (IPPR). I see this institute as a place in which faculty from different disciplines (e.g., Psychology, Health Sciences, and ISS), students, and visiting scholars can collaborate. This center would also be a place to train graduate students, both USFSP students and post-docs from other institutions. Thus, this center would has the promise of accomplishing the goal of developing "formal academic ties to other graduate programs within the University of South Florida system" and promote such ties with other universities outside the USF system. Such a center would also enhance USFSP's visibility in the community and provide valuable services to the community. The department has a number of applied researchers that work in the community and this facility would increase this work and the accessibility of the community to these resources.

Student Research

1. The psychology faculty's commitment to undergraduate research should be commended and highlights the student centeredness of the department. The amount of student research mentored by the psychology faculty is atypical of a department of its size without a Ph.D. program. The commitment to undergraduate research is evident in a number of things that the department has done. First, the psychology department founded the Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS) in 2004, and they have continued to plan and sponsor this event every year since. Over the past decade the psychology department has sponsored more student research at this event than any other USFSP department. Additionally, the department boasts that they have had over 50 students present their work at regional, national, and international meetings. The faculty have also published with undergraduate students, which again is atypical and takes much effort and time. Finally, the department has strengthened the quantitative methods portion of their curriculum and added the 4 + 1 program for quantitatively advanced students giving them the skills they need to become junior scientist.

2. This strong commitment to undergraduate research will provide a strong pool of applicants for their Masters programs as well as for Ph.D. programs at other institutions.

Teaching

1. **Online teaching**. The psychology department has made a commitment to creating high quality online courses. These are not the typical online courses – they are developed based on ALC outcomes (APA guidelines, outcomes, and indicators) and are revised annually. The model the department has developed for the creation, updating, and

implementation (e.g., triage system) of these courses is truly outstanding and should be preserved by ensuring that they continue to receive the necessary resources (technology) and personnel.

2. **Traditional and Online Teaching**. The number of SCH has dramatically increased over the past 10 years, while the number of faculty has not. This can be attributed to the department's commitment to developing high quality online courses that allow much higher caps than traditionally taught courses. This being said, it important that the department maintain a good mixture of online and traditional courses in order to meet the needs of all of their students and continue to foster the close-knit community atmosphere. The students that the external reviewers spoke with during our visit spoke highly of faculty teaching and were more or less split on their preference for online vs. traditional classes. This type of split is typical, with the traditional younger students preferring in-person courses and older and nontraditional (working full-time) preferring online courses and highlights the need to provide students with course options in both formats.

3. **Concern.** A concern voiced by some faculty and students, and observed by this reviewer, is the lack of flexibility in curriculum. Only a few electives are offered at the undergraduate level and only a small number of faculty have the opportunity to teach an elective. I believe this is a shortcoming given the loss of exposure of students to diverse areas of study. Additionally faculty lose the ability to teach in specialty area that they are excited about – and have the opportunity to get students excited about. Relatively few of the psychology majors will have the opportunity to work with faculty on their research, but electives are places where large numbers of students can become exposed to and excited about an area of research they never thought much about.

4. **TA Training Program.** Not only are the faculty committed to improving their own teaching and curriculum, but are also committed to training students to become junior colleagues through their teaching assistant training program. This is truly a unique program given that it focuses on training undergraduate students to work as TAs. This program pulls from national best practices utilizing "comprehensive TA training website and training materials developed and initiated by our own departmental faculty at other institutions." This program provides an invaluable experience for undergraduates that will give them a leg up when entering graduate school and competing for teaching assistantships that are becoming more and more competitive.

5. **Academic Learning Compact (ALC) and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).** The majority of the ALC review can be found in the reviewers' response to the Dean; below I listed a few additional comments and suggestions.

a) One suggestion I have is to further strengthen the quantitative sequence by making PSY 3204 (Psychological Statistics) a degree requirement. Although not a simple task to accomplish, this is possible and the USFSM psychology department has recently made this change.

b) **Student Learning Outcome** *1a. Understand and distinguish among the field's major theoretical traditions:* Currently this SLO is only assessed in an entry level course (PSY 2012). The department is aware of this weakness and in 2011/2012 collected pilot ETS data from a small convenience sample. These data showed that students were below benchmarks for the sensory/physiological area. After making changes to the program to improve student competency in this area (hiring two cognitive/neuroscience faculty and offering physiological psych twice per year), the department reassessed this SLO using a larger sample of ETS data, which showed students met benchmarks in the sensory/physiological area. My suggestion is to add an exit requirement to assess this SLO upon exiting, which is when this SLO should be assessed. At time of graduation students' knowledge should increase from the general knowledge attained in their introduction to psychology course, to a more in-depth level (application) attained from upper-level psychology courses and involvement in research.

c) *2a. Write clear and concise summaries of published research:* **Corroborating Evidence (ALC Requirement Only):** According to this SLO, student performance on assessment should correlate their final grades. I am not sure why one would expect knowledge of course material (grade in course) to be highly correlated (or even significantly correlate) with a single article summary. I am not surprised this correlation did not reach significance in some courses (e.g., cognitive psychology). Just because a student performs well on an article summary does not suggest that he/she will do the same in the class (or vice versa). One possible way to assess this outcome is to correlate students' grades on writing assignments across classes and professors. For example, a number of the 4000 level psychology courses have the requirement that students write research summaries -- how well do the grades on these various summaries correlate for a particular student across the classes?

In summary, the psychology department has accomplished a lot over the past 10 years. Based on my site visit and discussions with faculty and students, I foresee the department accomplishing even more over the next 10 years, as long and they continue to receive the support they need in regards to space for student and faculty research, staff to help them accomplish their goals, and time to conduct their research, teaching, and leadership roles.

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