

External Review of the Psychology Program

University of South Florida St Petersburg

Review Report – A.Sandra Willis, Ph.D.

Review Process and Sources

This external review report is based on the following sources and materials:

1. Department of Psychology Self-Study Report
2. Site Visit Interviews (April 16 & 17) with James McHale, Department Chair; Tiffany Chenneville, Incoming Chair; Robert Fowler, Professor Emeritus; Core Faculty: Mark Durand, Michiko Clutter (Psi Chi Advisor), Vikki Gaskin-Butler, Jennifer O'Brien (Psi Chi Advisor), Mark Pezzo (Graduate Coordinator), Christina Salnaitis (PSO Advisor); Nicole Emert, Distance Learning Specialist; Undergraduate Students from the Psychological Science Organization and Psi Chi Honor Society; and Graduate Students enrolled in the new Master's Program
3. Meeting with Frank Biafora, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Vivian Fueyo, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
4. Dean's Supplement to the Psychology Department Self-Study, in particular four questions posed by Dean Biafora in Section III
5. A preliminary review report based on answers to these four questions was submitted to Dean Biafora. I suggested that co-reviewer, Dr. Christina Ruva - USF Sarasota-Manatee, as a member of faculty in the regional USF system, respond to Question 1 concerning Academic Learning Compacts, with follow-up in her separate report. Parts of this review report are based on my answers to the Dean's Questions 2-4 in the preliminary report.

Review of the USFSP Psychology Program

Vibrant, Successful Department; Fully Engaged Faculty; Productive, Supportive Atmosphere

The USFSP Psychology Department has experienced tremendous growth over the last 10 years and has accomplished a great deal considering its relatively small size and extremely modest resources. Seven faculty members serve over 400 majors, and effectively teach a wide range of traditional and online courses with high student-faculty ratios; yet faculty also publish an impressive average of 1.5 peer-reviewed articles each year, along with many other scholarly publications – a rate far outpacing APA standards for Bachelors and Masters granting institutions and rivaling many excellent Ph.D. programs.

The Psychology Department enrolls the second highest number of majors in the College of Arts and Sciences and contributes to USFSP General Education courses by teaching General Psychology. In the Spring semester of 2014, consistent with previous semesters, Psychology had the *highest* total student credit hours of 3,821 and the highest average class size of 65. The Department offers an excellent

variety of courses in a sequence similar to that of USF Tampa, although the Department has changed the quantitative/methods course sequence, requiring Psychological Statistics before Research Methods, similar to other undergraduate research-intensive liberal arts programs within large state institutions, such as Duke and UCLA, as well as in smaller private universities like Samford. USFSP Psychology's commitment to excellent teaching includes mentoring undergraduate students as budding research scholars, whose work is successfully peer-reviewed for presentation and publication by regional and national professional organizations. The Department has added an additional requirement for graduation with a USFSP Psychology degree - a course in Diversity Issues in Psychology, to contribute to another important educational goal - producing greater awareness and transformational changes among students. There is ample evidence presented the Self-Study Report that the undergraduate curriculum is carefully designed and assessed, and shows improvements over time in achieving student learning outcomes that are aligned with the most recent American Psychological Association (APA) *Guidelines for Undergraduate Psychology Majors* (2013). Combined these accomplishments clearly demonstrate that the USFSP Psychology Department supports and realizes the Academic Learning Compacts, including the missions and strategic initiatives of the department, college, and university as stated in the Self-Study Report and the Dean's Supplement.

How does the Psychology Department succeed in accomplishing so much?

It was evident from the self-study report and site visit interviews that Psychology Department faculty members are highly engaged and highly motivated to contribute to the success of the department. The undergraduate, and particularly the graduate curricula, are born of collective work to which faculty members contribute complementary ideas, skills, and research backgrounds in family, community, health, social, cognitive neuroscience, and clinical psychology.

The department is exemplary in realizing the USFSP goals and objectives: In large part, this is due to the talents of its individual faculty members. Less visible, but every bit as important is the medium that allows this high degree of productivity - the scholarly atmosphere that has been created in the department. Scholarly and pedagogic accomplishments, so evident in the Self-Study Report, faculty vitae, and interviews, develop best in an egalitarian and collegial atmosphere where individuals are able to devote ample time to both teaching and research, and are able to work freely and creatively.

Nurturing such a respectful and productive atmosphere requires inviting input from all faculty members in major decisions about the work of the department as a whole. The leadership/faculty balance in this department impressed site reviewers as very healthy. An effective leader creates an optimal atmosphere by modeling success in teaching and research as well as, and perhaps more difficult for departments to achieve, providing support and appropriate recognition for faculty work. Leadership support of this sort is precious, uncommon, and should not be taken for granted; some departments suffer unnecessary strife created by the ego concerns that may go along with the desire for leadership. This strife distracts and discourages individuals and prevents the department from functioning optimally.

Master's Program. The department's desire to offer students opportunities to extend learning past the Bachelor's level and careful development of the Master's program are additional evidence of the full engagement of faculty in the USFSP Psychology Department. The department chair and faculty have carefully planned of two Master's program tracks: Experimental Psychology and Risk, Resilience, and Prevention (RRP).

A Master's program with two tracks, one in Experimental Psychology and one in Risk, Resilience, and Prevention (RRP), address and meet student demand. Having both tracks offers students interested in strengthening their research resumes an opportunity to gain experience that makes them competitive for Ph.D. programs across many fields in basic psychological science, such as, cognitive, neuroscience, social, and health psychology; the RRP program offers experience relevant to working in agencies as well as to applying to PhD programs in clinical/counseling psychology and health-related graduate and professional programs. This Master's program in the Psychology Department offers a model for growth and development for other departments in the USFSP College of Arts and Sciences.

The benefits of a strong Master's program are many. In addition to receiving an advanced degree and enhancing teaching and technician employment opportunities, graduate students in these programs have opportunities to collaborate in the active cutting-edge research programs of core faculty. The Department Faculty publish at an impressive clip each year; students are co-authors on many of published articles and chapters which benefits both faculty and graduate students. In addition to research, graduate (as well as advanced undergraduates) have opportunities to learn to teach and to serve as teaching assistants. Students interviewed uniformly spoke to the value of these mentored opportunities for their professional development and preparedness for graduate study and entry into the field after graduate study.

Graduate and advanced undergraduate students' rich associations and collaboration with generative faculty members encourage learning and application of critical thinking skills as well as fostering communication skills central to both research and teaching. Acquiring and demonstrating these skills enhance employment opportunities, and in the long run, bolster the reputation of the department, the college, and the university. Students seeking admission to top-tier Ph.D. programs, especially competitive in Psychology, and professional programs such as medicine and law, are better prepared to apply, gain admission, and perform successfully in these programs. The partial list of Ph.D. programs USFSP Psychology alumni have been accepted to, provided in their Self Study, is very impressive.

Broader Impact. The Master's program also addresses the health and well-being of residents of the county and region in ways that enhance quality of individual and family life. Critical areas addressed by the new Master's program – health and mental health, diversity and cultural competence, ethical responsibility, and creative new approaches to addressing important social issues - are all concerned with and valuable to the well-being of people in St. Petersburg and surrounding areas. As a public institution, areas addressed are worthy of state support and have demonstrated ability to attract external grants.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Supporting and rewarding full engagement of faculty are foundational to maintaining and optimizing motivation for teaching and research endeavors of a premier, productive department.

Recognition of the time balance essential to maintaining generative research and quality teaching necessary for the undergraduate and Master's programs to flourish is evident. The current teaching load of two courses per semester is appropriate and should be maintained for research-active faculty. This said, the department chair and program directors would benefit from decreased course loads. Admirably, Psychology faculty serve approximately 400 undergraduate majors, which represents extraordinary growth over the last 10 years, tripling from levels one decade ago with no appreciable increase in faculty lines. Moreover, in 2014 the department now also serves graduate students in the fledgling Master's program. These accomplishments were built on the shoulders of dedicated, hard-working faculty members without a departmental administrative assistant. Support and reward for their exceptional efforts is certainly due.

Full-time administrative staff person. It is important to not only recognize and support but also to find better ways to enable the productivity of the department. This is best accomplished by hiring a full-time dedicated administrative assistant whose efforts will allow more appropriate use of faculty skills, time, and training efforts. Based on the Self-Study Report and faculty interviews, this is an especially dire need. Over the past decade the department chair, aided by other department faculty, and occasionally by administrative assistants at the college level, have shouldered the necessary secretarial and administrative support work for the Psychology Department. With demands as high as they are at USFSP, department faculty need to be able to devote all of their scholarly time to teaching, research, and professional and university service; although they were not interviewed as part of the program review assessment, college staff members are likely already stretched by serving so many departments in Arts and Sciences. Hire of a skilled administrative professional will facilitate faculty work in the Psychology Department, necessary to maintain and accelerate the educational, research, and grant-writing goals of the department as well as facilitate efforts at the college level.

An ***experienced and dedicated unit grants administrator to assist faculty*** in the intensive process of meeting exhaustive paperwork and budgetary specifications required of applicants for external funding (both pre- and post-award) would be a strategic hire with potential to "pay off" in the future; certainly at the present time it would be beneficial to psychology faculty as well as to all departments in USFSP College of Arts and Sciences.

During the site visit interviews, two psychology faculty members expressed their need for ***additional research lab and "department" space***. Sufficient department space is a core need for any functional research-active department. Space appears necessary to better accommodate the Davis Hall-based experimental research programs of current faculty and to attract new faculty tenure-track hires whose research will contribute to the department, college, and university's scholarly mission. Graduate and undergraduate research assistants need space to meet and write in close proximity to their faculty mentors. The department has proposed an Institute for the Promotion of Psychological Resilience, and if

given wing this institute would certainly help greatly with the scientific work of the department and allied scholars in other disciplines at USFSP. But a “home base” feel for the Psychology department and its graduate students is still lacking and should be addressed as a priority as soon as a viable, even if intermediary, space plan can be struck upon.

Ongoing support for the department’s exceptional teaching accomplishments, which include an outstanding distance learning initiative and an innovative teaching assistantship program. This department’s commitment to carefully monitored and high-quality distance learning in addition to outstanding in-class teaching is impressive. All faculty members agreed to develop a distance course in response to administrative request. During the site visit, Dr. Mark Durand, well known for his research on autism and optimistic parenting and abnormal psychology textbooks, demonstrated this high quality, engaging style of distance education. Psychology Department faculty appreciate the support of and attribute their success to an administration that enabled rather than micro-managed their efforts, and to a person saluted the ongoing assistance and support of the talented, well-organized, creative full-time instructional technologist, Nicole Emert. Faculty describe Nikki as a colleague and collaborator who has been crucial to the success of producing and maintaining the quality of the department’s online courses. Particularly important, several faculty members emphasized, is that Nikki knows all of the faculty and their course curricula and content well, and possesses the IT expertise necessary to help less-skilled faculty organize and otherwise “translate” traditional course content into engaging online education.

Based on the Self-Study Report, there also appears to be limited but dedicated funding allocated to the very necessary support graduate/undergraduate students provide for faculty teaching distance courses. Junior instructional designers (JIDs) and graduate research assistants (RAs) facilitate assessments of the online offerings in ways that enhance the course experience for current and future enrolled students. Another impressive adaptation of this department, which until 2014 had no graduate students to serve as teaching assistants, instructional designers or graduate research assistants was its creation of an outstanding mentorship program to train and provide closely-monitored teaching opportunities for undergraduate teaching assistants. A comprehensive TA training website was created, a mentored directed study course was implemented to teach students the ropes, and limited funded opportunities for upper-division students who had completed the mentored course to assist faculty in the delivery of large online and live courses in a teaching assistant role were introduced. Research-focused psychology departments in the U.S. and Canada typically employ teaching assistants, and the department’s diligence and creativity in establishing a successful undergraduate teaching assistant (UTA) program is noteworthy. UTAs are similarly used in many North American psychology departments; the department is now also in position to employ graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) as well.

This said, faculty voiced concern about the limited accessibility of funds to support TAs at both graduate and undergraduate levels. The Self-Study reports that while decisions about TA/JID/RA support have always been enrollment-based decisions made by central administration using a single enrollment-based formula, many of the Psychology Departments’ “skills” courses (especially Research Methods, which includes a lab, but other quantitative and writing-intensive courses as well) are by design smaller enrollment classes. Small, for USFSP’s Psychology Department, is 30-40 students; this is actually

considered large enrollment for rigorous methods and writing-intensive courses by standards of other universities with similar educational missions. As a solution, most Psychology Departments around the country utilize TAs to support instruction and evaluation. The USFSP Psychology department has reasonably requested increasing GTA funds from the current level (self-study reports just \$30K per year for the entire graduate program) to both support graduate students' needs for some relief from the high cost of graduate tuition, which they pay out-of-pocket and also facilitate the teaching efforts of the faculty in a manner commensurate with other psychology departments nationally.

Consider ways to encourage research and teaching innovation: Mini –sabbaticals. Smaller departments like this one that maintain a strong research profile find creative ways to enable faculty research productivity. One example, with which some departmental faculty are already familiar, is a periodic one- course release in a selected semester to tend programmatic research– such releases are especially helpful to pre-tenure faculty but are also used creatively by many departments nationally to help recharge already-productive faculty at midpoints between regular sabbaticals. Time can be the greatest reward for productive faculty. Other acknowledgements of the time faculty dedicate to teaching-relevant activities might be considered and implemented; for example, credit might be given in the annual review process for teaching innovation or pedagogy research; for the guidance/instruction of TAs, for develop TA training programs; and for grant-writing. The department does appear to appropriately take into consideration the sheer amount of time demanded by preparation and submission of federal (NIH, NSF, ACF, DOE) grant applications – successful, or not -- in recognizing faculty work and achievements in how it conducts and credits work in its annual review process.

Summer Grants might be introduced to help support faculty-student research collaborations during the summer months for those faculty without active grant support; such grants should be seen as a support mechanism principally for students rather than for faculty, though clearly student researchers would further enable faculty productivity.

USFSP Career Development Center creates a program to establish and provide liaisons between off-campus sites and students interested in gaining work experience.

Strategies for Addressing the Internship Quandary. Students everywhere are always thirsty for community engagement and workplace training opportunities. Experience in the workplace is desirable to solidify choice of academic major and may benefit graduates seeking jobs; however, due to the specialized nature of work in Psychology, entirely different from business, environmental science, and educational settings, internships may be inappropriate for students unless they have had specialized, advanced training, and have been evaluated by a supervisor familiar with the nature of clinical work. What might be appropriate internships in applied graduate Psychology programs are usually not appropriate places for undergraduate Psychology majors. At minimum, students will be required to undergo time-consuming background checks. Students may also need malpractice insurance coverage before they are able to have contact with clients/patients and pose potential for liability risk to the department and the university. In certain settings, students themselves may be at risk.

If students are to receive academic credit for meaningful internship work, internship placements must be carefully selected and cultured, and carefully mentored by a site supervisor and a university sponsor. Though it would be inappropriate for existing Psychology Department faculty to reallocate their already overstretched time and effort to sponsoring and overseeing such initiatives, ***USFSP's Career Development Center, ideally working with its Center for Civic Engagement, might creatively marshal resources so as to create a program to establish and provide liaisons between off-campus sites and students interested in gaining work experience.*** A part- or full-time staffer in one or both of those units with requisite background in psychology might be charged with growing and sustaining such a program for dozens of the department's 400 majors annually. Such work is best handled by a dedicated staffer given the discipline-specific need for contracts with supporting host agencies, oversight and monitoring of student performance by the sites, and university liability for any unethical activity by students working with vulnerable populations placed in such settings. Such labor-intensive oversight cannot be handled adequately and responsibly within the department by already overcommitted faculty but is successfully orchestrated through career centers and community placement services at other institutions nationally. The department comments on some model programs in the Self-Study Report. Alternatively, resourceful students may be encouraged to seek volunteer experience on their own with agencies accustomed to training and handling volunteers.

Invest in the Already-Vibrant Psychological Science Organization (PSO) to Enhance its Graduate Education and Career Exploration program /mentorship/partnership. In 2004, the department created and maintains a vibrant Psychological Science Organization that augments its Psi Chi Honor Society. Departmental faculty felt strongly an organization was needed to support all of its majors, not just those with highest GPAs. Student members of both organizations interviewed during the site visit were incredibly enthusiastic and highly motivated to their Psychology Department. Indeed faculty report that the student organizations do remarkable work, which several faculty members support through their sponsorship. Members of PSO and Psi Chi have for 10 years co-sponsored a colloquium series, despite the fact that the department is provided with no dedicated funds for such a series. Individual departmental faculty have paid eminent visiting speakers out-of-pocket or creatively leveraged other funding sources to provide small stipends for nationally-recognized experts who meet with PSO students after their talks. Some modest funding annually (even \$1000-2000 to help fund speakers) would go a long way toward strengthening this colloquium series which students and faculty alike report draws dozens of USFSP students – and occasionally even 100 or more for truly top speakers. Further, faculty and students are hoping to work with USFSP's Alumni Affairs to bring successful alumni back to USFSP to meet with psychology majors, so that they may learn about the many careers and related fields in psychology, former students' experiences in researching, selecting, and applying to PhD programs as well as interviewing tips. Other planned initiatives would also include preparing for the GRE; arranging panels of professionals from the community to present information about careers, work settings, training paths; and arranging panels of current PhD students. Modest administrative support for these important professional development efforts would pay substantial dividends.

Looking ahead, Leadership, New Faculty

Qualifications, Background, and Characteristics of the Next Priority Hire. This incredibly productive department has many acute needs for support. The short answer to Dean Biafora’s question about who the department should hire first (a tenure-track professor or an instructor) is that both tenure-track faculty and instructional teaching staff are genuinely needed right away. Given the growth in number of majors and attentive research mentorship faculty provide to undergraduate and graduate students, the department needs both new tenure-track hires skilled in conducting leading-edge research and involving students in this work, and teaching staff (instructors) to help handle the increasing student demand for psychology courses – particularly in the quantitative sequence (Research Methods-Experimental Design and Analysis-Tests & Measurement). We would certainly recommend that the next faculty hire be for a tenure-track position who is a proven scientist working in an applied area (agreed upon by faculty in the department), bringing strong potential for research productivity and experience securing research grants. New hires for the tenure-track faculty hire would, of course, be expected to mentor undergraduates and graduate students. It may help if this person, and/or the instructor hire, whom we also recommend be pursued now, had graduate school or post-doctoral experience with an REU or similar program in which mentoring skills were developed. Experience teaching courses online, especially for the new teaching faculty (instructor line) would be an added benefit.

Department Leadership. At the time of the program review the department was led by James McHale, a UC Berkeley-trained clinical psychologist, formerly on faculty at Clark University. Dr. McHale is well-regarded nationally and internationally for his research on infant development and coparenting. It is admirable that, in addition to his successful research and teaching, he worked tirelessly over the last 10 years to shape and nurture a department that shines so brightly. Dr. McHale, by example and in his leadership, collaborated with and thereby enabled talented individuals to excel, and possessed the vision to integrate the efforts of all these individually-gifted scholars into an outstanding Department of Psychology. In interviews with Dr. McHale and each of the members of the psychology faculty, it was clear that he knows each person well and has provided the right combination and blend of advisement, encouragement, and opportunity for involvement to support the teaching and research talents of all faculty, and to allow junior faculty to build and maintain their research programs. Dr. McHale himself was highly complementary of the academic and leadership skills of his colleagues, and spoke of the priority importance during his tenure as Chair of relentlessly protecting the “scholarly space” of each individual faculty member so they could excel and flourish as scientists as well as teachers. By all accounts he was successful in doing so, supported by a forward-thinking and supportive administration. The department is now scheduled to transition to the capable leadership of Associate Professor Dr. Tiffany Chenneville, herself a nationally-recognized expert in ethics and decision-making of children. USFSP is indeed fortunate to have such a deep reserve of talented faculty, tribute to the thoughtful and successful hires of the past decade. Their future is bright.

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