

External Review: Department of Psychology, Western Carolina University

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Richard Miller and Barry Burkhart: External Reviewers

Vicki Szabo and John Sherlock: Internal Reviewers

I. Introduction

A. Description of the visit length: Drs. Barry Burkhart and Richard Miller arrived for the Psychology Department review the afternoon of February 14th. Richard Miller is the Department Chair for the Department of Psychology at Texas A & M University at Kingsville and Barry Burkhart is Professor of Psychology at Auburn University. John Sherlock is Program Director of Human Resources Department in College of Education at Western Carolina University and Vicki Szabo is Associate Professor of History at Western Carolina University. Professors Sherlock and Szabo are both internal review team members. The first team meeting was on Sunday, February 14th, which was a dinner meeting with the review team and Dr. Allison Morrison-Shetlar, Provost, followed by a team meeting with the internal and external review team members. The remainder of the review filled both Monday, February 15th and Tuesday February 16th until mid-afternoon on the 16th.

B. Summary and Description of Meetings Conducted by the Review Team: The review officially began with a dinner meeting with the review team and Dr. Allison Morrison-Shetler, Provost of Western Carolina University. A brief review team meeting on the evening of the 14th followed this dinner meeting. Monday, February 15th, was a full day of meetings beginning with a breakfast with the review team and Dr. Carol Burton, Associate Provost of Undergraduate Studies and Mr. David Onder, Assessment Director. This meeting was followed by a meeting with Dean Carpenter following by a tour of the facilities with the review team and Dr. L Alvin Malesky, Department Head for Psychology at Western Carolina University. This included a tour of the recently occupied clinical space, which was proposed as a program enhancement by the last review team in 2009 and now has come to fruition. Following a brief work meeting, the review team met with Dr. Brian Kloeppe, Graduate Dean for Western Carolina University. This was followed by a working lunch meeting in which the review team met with both graduate and undergraduate students from the Department of Psychology. The lunch meeting was followed by a meeting with the review team and Marilyn Beck, Administrative Support Associate and a meeting with the Director of the Undergraduate Program, Windy Gordon. The review team then met with Dr. David McCord, Professor of Psychology, to discuss the development of the doctoral program proposal. Following a brief work meeting, an extended meeting with the review team and Psychology faculty was held. The day ended with a dinner with the review team and a summary of the day's events. On Tuesday, February 16th, the review team met for a work meeting and then a pre-exit meeting with the review team and Dr. Allison Morrison-Shetlar. Following this meeting, the review team met with Graduate Program Coordinators, Tom Ford, Lori Unruh, and Kia Asberg. The review team then met with Dr. Dale Carpenter, Dean of

College of Education followed by a meeting with the review team and administrative team for the college and department. Following lunch with the review team and David Onder and Carol Burton, the external reviewers returned to their travels.

II. Analysis of Program

a. Undergraduate Program. The undergraduate major in psychology is one of the largest at Western Carolina University and continues to grow. Currently, there are 10 tenured faculty, six tenure-track faculty and four fixed-term faculty teaching over 400 active undergraduate majors and more than 350 undergraduate minors.

In August, 2013 the American Psychological Association published *Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major, 2.0* that outlines best practices for undergraduate instruction. The undergraduate major curriculum at WCU is built around the strong required core recommended by APA, including courses in General Psychology, Statistics and Research Methods, History of Psychology, and a capstone course (Senior Seminar) To provide an understanding of the breadth of the discipline, students must take electives from each of four areas of psychology (Developmental, Clinical, Social, and Experimental). Beyond the core curriculum and the distribution requirement, the program provides students with considerable flexibility.

There is a strong undergraduate advising process that guides students through a curriculum designed to build student skills as they progress through the courses. The department has recognized the importance for students to master quantitative literacy skills and most students complete the Research Design and Analysis courses early, so that later courses can build on the skills learned in those courses.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the program is that many undergraduate students are actively engaged in research and other individual projects through the Department's PSY 280 and PSY 480 courses, which are taught by various members of the department. How workload is calculated for these courses is not clear. In addition, research experience is available for undergraduate students working with graduate students. These experiences provide students with a grounded understanding of how knowledge is created, which is not as likely to develop when just reading about research.

From all of the material made available to the review team, the program appears to be rigorous and enjoys an exceptionally high completion rate. One area of concern is the enrollment growth in the senior seminar, which has increased in the past two years from 15 to 24. As a capstone course, this is not ideal.

A relatively unique and commendable aspect of WCU's psychology program is the exceptional advising role provided by the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Windy Gordon. While Dr. Gordon is doing an excellent job in that position, he is only one person servicing an ever-increasing number of majors. Developing an additional leadership position to support undergraduate student success would seem to be appropriate given the number of majors and doing this aligns well with the department's commitment to faculty-student engagement and student success.

The students with whom we spoke viewed the Department very favorably. The undergraduate students we interviewed indicated that they found the faculty to be supportive, available, caring, approachable and understanding. They rated advising as personalized and credited the process with being able to notice students' potential early in their academic careers. Students seem to be able to complete the program in a timely manner. Two concerns expressed were that classes had become crowded and that they wished for more elective options. In reviewing the catalog, it would seem that there are several elective options available on the books but perhaps with the limited number of faculty in the department, some classes are not always offered on a regular basis. Another concern expressed by the students is that the current program does not make much use of prerequisites. Thus, students have taken senior level classes in their sophomore year. The department should consider implementing a more structured timetable for what classes should be taken at what stage of a student's program of study. One final suggestion was that the students would appreciate having a teaching assistant for more of the classes.

The department offers a minor that requires the introductory class and after that, students are allowed to take whatever courses they want. The department should consider creating more structure for the minor so that students who are taking the minor are provided with a more consistent understanding of psychology as a science. This could be accomplished by requiring students to take classes in key core areas.

The Department uses various assessment measures to evaluate the program. The current assessment plan may not be providing the type of data that would be most useful for program improvement. The major pre/post assessment is a test of the knowledge base. The APA Guidelines set out five recommended student learning outcomes or goals. They are Goal 1: Knowledge Base in Psychology, Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking, Goal 3: Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World, Goal 4: Communication, and Goal 5: Professional Development. The department should consider using assessment measures to evaluate how well students are doing in mastering additional goals from the APA Guidelines.

b. Graduate Programs: For a small department in a regional university, the graduate training opportunities at Western Carolina University Department of Psychology are surprisingly varied and comprehensive. In addition to their two-track Master's program in psychology, the department offers a Specialist Degree in School Psychology. The School Psychology graduate program is accredited by the National Association of School Psychology and, thus, is outside the scope of this current program review.

The master's graduate program has been and is currently recognized as an unusually strong program for both the clinical track and general experimental track. Both programs meet their goals of preparing students for doctoral program work or, in the case of some of students in the clinical track, readiness for entry-level master's clinical work. The separation of experimental and clinical tracks is not absolute, in that faculty routinely work with students in both programs; a number of the clinical students have worked with experimental faculty and vice versa. The

programs share some course work although the clinical program specialization requires the clinical track students take considerably more specialization courses.

The program's curriculum requirements are appropriate and appear to be well accepted by graduate students. In addition to the formal course requirements, both faculty and students commented on the formal and informal strength of the program in providing individual research and professional mentoring. In particular, the graduate students believed that they had essentially unlimited access to research supervision with multiple faculty members. Students were clear about the program's mission and seemed to feel a good fit with the goals of the graduate training program. Students' entry qualifications were adequate and students felt a strong sense of engagement with faculty. Graduate stipends were limited and modest, but consistent with most other masters programs at regional comprehensive universities. With the addition of a doctoral program, the level of funding for graduate students may become a limitation for recruitment. The issue of providing support for doctoral students is one several issues which will require further consideration as the department moves forward with the implementation of the doctoral program.

The general purpose of the Master's program is to prepare graduate students to continue at the doctoral level. Moreover, the track record for the Department of Psychology at Western Carolina University in preparing students and facilitating their entry into doctoral programs is quite remarkable. Only a few other masters programs are able to replicate the record of success at placing students into doctoral programs that this department has accomplished. The quality of students and commitment of students to the program is particularly noteworthy. Our assessment was that this strength of engagement is the core ingredient accounting for the remarkable success of graduate training at WCU and, thus, it is essential that the department protect this resource as the development of the PsyD program moves forward. In meetings with the graduate students it was evident that they were clearly and strongly committed to their goal of matriculation through Western Carolina and on to doctoral programs, having seen the success of their earlier cohorts

III. Analysis of Faculty

a. Qualifications

The WCU Psychology Department currently includes 20 full-time faculty members who teach both undergraduate and graduate classes. Of these individuals, 10 are tenured, 6 are non-tenured, and 4 are full-time fixed-term. The faculty is fully qualified to provide the program as designed and include professors whose training reflects the breadth of the discipline as well as faculty with specialization in areas for which there are graduate degrees offered – clinical psychology as well as school psychology.

b. Resources and Support

The Department of Psychology is one of the academic departments in the College of Education and Allied Professions. It is housed on the third floor of the Killian building and occupies an 11,475 square foot area (instructional and non-instructional space). All full-time faculty members have individual office spaces, while part-time faculty share offices. A limited number of small "testing rooms" are available for faculty and student use. The department's space also includes 3 classrooms and a conference room area, all of which are shared by other academic units in the college.

Interviews with the faculty indicated that they are satisfied with library holdings and access, as well as lab space and technological sources. Also, they are satisfied with professional development / travel funding, which comes from multiple sources in the department, college and university. Faculty members do not have adequate or appropriate compensation. This is an issue for the institution and the system, but for this high performing faculty, half of whom are untenured, this could lead to real and severe non-retention. The faculty perform at high levels in instruction and service, and at a reasonable level of scholarship, and are being asked to take on even more with the proposed PsyD. This department should become a college priority when additional salary, bonus funds or opportunities for course release become available. The Dean and Provost, both of whom have indicated support for the proposed PsyD, will need to find additional resources to support this faculty to have a long-range trajectory at the current strength.

Support for tenure-track faculty was seen as a positive, and the faculty indicated satisfaction with the tenure process, although some faculty expressed concern with a clear path for promotion to from associate to full professor. Perhaps the department, which already embraces a healthy mentoring program for non-tenured faculty, should offer mentorship for associates seeking full (some of whom may self-identify as promotion seekers, others may not). Those with heavy service or administrative loads, which could become more burdensome with the PsyD, may need better direction or even course release prior to seeking promotion.

One area in which faculty expressed dissatisfaction was in the lack of support for writing grants to seek external funding. Several who had received large grants during their professional career expressed concern about the lack of institutional support for grant activities. Our conversation with the Dean and faculty indicated interest in a college-level grant and contract / external funding support staff or position. This would facilitate external applications for this growing, mission-oriented department, for whom external funding will soon be a necessity.

c. Teaching, Research/Creative Activity, and Service

The faculty's commitment to quality teaching is evident in interviews with students, faculty and administrators. Evidence of this commitment can be seen in the unprecedented growth of their undergraduate major and minor. As noted earlier, students and alumni were uniform in their praise of the faculty, their caring attitude and professional teaching skills. Another measure of exceptional teaching is the number of students who presented papers/posters at professional conferences (N=50 last year alone) and also the number of students who have published, either independently or in collaboration with faculty. One area of concern is the low enrollment in the school psychology program. In consideration of the attractiveness of school psychology jobs in North Carolina, the department should consider actively recruiting from outside the state and arranging for internships outside of the state as well.

Many of the faculty are actively involved in service to the department, the college, the university and the community. They are also to be commended for their engagement in professional service.

In terms of research, faculty members in the department have a moderate amount of peer-reviewed publications, as would be expected given the high course load requirements. In addition, it is clear that scholarly productivity is not evenly distributed among the faculty. Also, in general, faculty members have not pursued much in the way of extramural funding. This is an area that is ripe for growth, especially with regard the McKee Clinic.

IV. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

a. Adequate Facilities

The physical space for the department is somewhat less than desirable, given their research and teaching mission, especially in light of their growth in the number of majors and minors. The paucity of dedicated lab space inhibits the process of working with students in a way that promotes the *culture of research*, a goal important to the faculty in the department. There is a notable lack of specialized labs dedicated to physiological psychology, biopsychology, developmental psychology and social psychology. For undergraduate students in particular, the opportunity to work in collaboration with professors and graduate students conducting research is a valuable educational experience.

The McKee Clinic space is an outstanding addition to the department's facilities. With testing spaces, office space, up-to-date technology, the clinic is poised to become a real asset, both to the students and the community in terms of services performed but also to WCU in terms of potential funds generated by the operation of the clinic.

b. Adequate Budget

The departmental budget includes operating expenses (\$35,000 annually), the Education and Technology budget of about \$11,000 a year, and Project Value funding, which provides up to \$650 to cover professional development for tenured faculty and \$750 to cover professional development for untenured faculty. These funds can be supplemented with internal grants such that most faculty can count on \$1200 to attend conferences. These budget figures seem to be in line with that experienced by peer institutions.

V. Summary of program strengths and areas for improvement

There was a consensus among the members of the review committee that the Department of Psychology at Western Carolina University was defined by its commitment and success at accomplishing the core academic missions of the department. Faculty members were engaged and shared a sense of communal vision, which resulted in the educational product being provided at an extraordinarily strong fashion at both the graduate and undergraduate level. This is an impressive program in providing for the needs of its students.

The sense of a shared mission and the commitment that the faculty all seem to bring to this shared mission was striking. In fact, one of the concerns is that this department is performing at a very high level of proficiency, but is doing so without the level of economic and material resources, professional staff, support services, and facilities that characterize similar high functioning programs at many other institutions. The review committee recognized that this program is dependent on the shared vision and commitment, such that the faculty collectively has agreed to put the well being of the department as a priority, sometimes at the expense of

personal growth and development. The consequence is that their work as a department is exceptional, but providing such significant educational programming may strain the limits of their capacity without an infusion of resources. We note that the evidence of this extraordinary effectiveness is clearly demonstrable in the number of students who are matriculating to graduate school from the Master's programs and the percentages of undergraduates who are involved in research activities, outreach activities, and service learning projects, all of which are higher than comparable universities with which these reviewers are familiar.

At the undergraduate level, the department offers a capstone experience in their senior seminar course. However, this course has grown beyond that which is recommended for a capstone course. One possible solution is to allow students to choose between two capstone experiences, both of which provide experiential learning opportunities. One would emphasize scientific literacy including a hands-on research activity, which would be most appropriate for students who want to go on the graduate school. The second track would be a capstone that emphasizes service learning, including a hands-on project, which would be most appropriate for those students who plan to go directly onto the job market after obtaining their bachelor's degree. The undergraduate minor needs some additional structure beyond that which is now required. In addition, the department may want to consider some formal minor for nursing students who do not make it into the Nursing BS program. If Nursing / HHS can design a minor for those students – with such a high rate of program non-acceptance – PSY doesn't have to design approved program minors, which could ultimately become a SACS problem. This would streamline the advising process, also, and save time internally in the department.

The department should consider developing and filling a position of Associate Director for Undergraduate Studies. The department is to be commended for creating the Director of Undergraduate Studies to address the tremendous growth in undergraduate psychology majors and minors; Dr. Windy Gordon is doing a tremendous job in that role—but he is only one person. Developing an additional leadership position to support undergrad student success is appropriate given the volume of students—and aligns with the department's commitment to faculty-student engagement and student success.

The addition of the clinic space is a welcome and potentially productive resource. The clinic could serve as a conduit for the acquisition of external contracts that would help support the graduate programming and provide educational opportunities and volunteer service missions for graduate and undergraduate students. We recommend that the program give considerable thought and investment into bringing the potential that the clinic represents into full operation. To this end, the department should consider creating a full-time administrative position for the clinic. The clinic is essential to student learning and community outreach. It also has tremendous growth potential—particularly in terms of contracted services and, potentially, grants; however, this requires dedicated staffing. The department is to be commended for recently creating a clinic director position and hiring Dr. Nathan Roth. In order to effectively pursue and manage these growth opportunities, the current structure of having a rotating graduate student in the role of clinic coordinator is inadequate; this must be a full-time paid administrative position.

The quality of graduate students and particularly the ability of the program to provide an educational experience sufficient to enable these master's level students to get into doctoral level programs is a remarkable strength of a small regional university. The committee is aware of only one other program that has as stronger record of such productivity. Areas in which the program could make improvements include being able to continue the congruence and clarity of the shared vision as they add the doctoral program. The committee recognized that there seems to be some concern among faculty program directors as to whether or not they would be able to sustain all of their programs if they added the doctoral program. This is an understandable sentiment particularly given the scarcity of resources of faculty lines and other financial hardships and impediments. However, the department has been able to maintain the strength of these programs. It seemed to the committee that rather than cannibalize programs in order to staff the new PsyD program, the programs could work together towards a synthesis of their strengths that would enable all programs to reach their goals.

Faculty members are involved in significant co-curricular activities that provide important student learning outcomes but do not generate workload credit. Examples of this include undergraduate student research, unless done in conjunction with a particular course, thesis supervision, service learning/internship activities, mentoring, sponsoring of student organizations, honors contracts, etc. To not compensate any of these activities with workload credit is atypical for an institution like WCU. Most comparable universities document and compensate faculty for such activities within their workload credit calculations. It would be worthwhile to document the extent of these activities so that administrators have a clearer idea of the time and effort involved in teaching outside of the classroom.

How does this department continue to function at this high level with the addition of a doctoral program? Given the commitment of the faculty, we believe it can be accomplished, but the institution will need to be responsive to the needs for resources. To maintain its unique synthesis of strengths and commitment as they add the mission of developing a doctoral program, the department will require an administrative commitment that matches that of the faculty.

In summary, we commend the department for its excellent work. We commend the administration for the apparent recognition that this is a uniquely talented and accomplished department that meets the academic mission at a level of excellence, unusual even in much larger, much better resourced departments. Moreover, in our meeting with the Dean and Provost, these strengths seem to be clearly recognized.

VI. Summary of recommendations

The areas of strength in the department are easily discerned. The commitment to the academic integrity of their educational mission, the engagement of students, the solidarity and congruence of vision that the faculty share are strikingly evident. Again, our concern is that if the department continues without some infusion of resources that they may well reach a tipping point in which they are not able to sustain this level of commitment, engagement, and success. Thus, adding the doctoral program should be accomplished with considerable due diligence towards assuring that

the unique character of connection and engagement is sustained. This faculty does more with less and care should be taken not to burden them to the loss of their extraordinary productivity.