University of Wisconsin-Platteville
Department of Psychology
Report to the Assessment Oversight Committee

1. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?

Each semester, the Psychology Department hosts a senior focus group in which we ask graduating seniors to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the department. We also ask them to comment upon whether they feel their education at UW-Platteville has helped them achieve our 10 student learning outcomes (SLOs) and which of their activities (both curricular and extracurricular) were most relevant to the achievement of the SLOs. During the semesters in which this evaluation was conducted, students unanimously felt that their education at UW-Platteville helped them meet our learning outcomes. We have attached a summary of the results from our Senior Focus Groups’ assessment of our student learning outcomes.

2. What have you learned as a result?

We have received the “richest” data from our Senior Focus Groups and Senior Surveys. Specifically, we have learned that:

a. Students are increasingly frustrated regarding unavailability of upper level courses, especially Behavioral Research I and II. We do not have enough faculty to offer our upper level behavioral research classes frequently enough. (Ideally, we need to offer two sections of the course each semester. Until a change is implemented in the 2012-2013 academic year, we are only offering two sections of the course every fourth semester. At present, we are overloading the course in attempt to meet student demand.) There are currently three students who will not be able to complete their psychology major within four years because they have been unable to get into Behavioral Research I and II. (These issues can be expanded upon in the oral presentation if necessary.)

b. Students report confusion regarding jobs they can obtain with only a bachelor’s degree in psychology. (Students are satisfied with their knowledge of graduate school options.)

c. While many students report dissatisfaction with the job market, several graduating seniors were able to obtain good paying jobs without a graduate degree.

d. Graduate schools in counseling and social work have heightened expectations regarding students’ completion of volunteering, internships, and/or human services related work experience.
3. Document specific changes that have resulted from your assessment efforts.

*Theme A: Frustration with the Lack of Availability of Upper Level Courses*

*Changes Made in Reference to Theme A:*

a. **Course caps**

During the Spring 2011 registration period, all psychology courses (other than General Psychology) were capped at artificially low numbers. Psychology majors were instructed to contact the department chair to request to be added into psychology classes. All psychology majors were able to get at least one psychology class; most were able to get two.

b. **Request of new faculty**

The Psychology Department has requested an additional tenure track faculty member to teach our advanced behavioral research courses. This faculty member will also teach upper level courses that serve as electives for the Substance Abuse Counseling emphasis.

c. **Offer Behavioral Research I and II more frequently**

Beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year, Behavioral Research I and II will be offered more frequently. One section will be offered in the fall; two will be offered in the spring. (At present, two sections of the course are offered every fourth semester.)

d. **GPA requirement for psychology majors**

We are beginning the process with the relevant curriculum committees to have a GPA requirement for students wishing to declare a psychology major. We are proposing that students have a 2.5 cumulative GPA (after the completion of 45 credits) to declare a psychology major. The reasons for establishing this GPA requirement are two-fold. First, a GPA requirement will help manage our enrollment growth and decrease demand for our upper level behavioral research courses. Second, several professors teaching Behavioral Research I and II have reported increased frustration with the academic ability of students completing those courses. A review of psychology major GPAs over the past six years supports their frustration. The average GPA of graduates with psychology majors has slowly, but steadily declined over the past six years. (For example, the average GPA of psychology majors graduating during the 2005-2006 academic year was 3.29, while the average GPA of psychology majors graduating during the 2010-2011 academic year was 3.02.) The percentage of majors graduating with cumulative GPAs of 2.5 or lower has
also steadily increased. (For example, from December 2005 through May 2010, approximately 6% of psychology majors graduated with cumulative GPAs lower than 2.5. By comparison, for the 2010-2011 academic year, 12% of students graduated with GPAs lower than 2.5.)

Theme B: Confusion Regarding Job Opportunities for Psychology Majors Pursuing Employment with Only a Bachelor’s Degree

Changes Made in Reference to Theme B:

a. Tri-State Undergraduate Psychology Conference Panel

When UW-Platteville hosted the Tri-State Undergraduate Psychology Conference in 2008, we organized a panel of experts to address potential careers for students without a graduate degree.

b. Advisory group

We revised the membership of our Advisory Group to include either individuals who achieved success in their careers with only bachelor’s degree in psychology or professionals who employ individuals without graduate degrees. We most recently met in October 2010.

c. Revision of Careers course

We have revised the content and purchased a new text for our Careers in Counseling and Human Services course so that the course contains more information regarding what careers students can pursue with a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

Theme C: Frustration with the Job Market from Students Pursuing Employment with Only a Bachelor’s Degree

Changes Made in Reference to Theme C:

In general, we have spent increased time talking with alumni and learning from those alums who have achieved career success with only a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

a. Addition of a Substance Abuse Counseling Emphasis

A growing area of employment in human services is in substance abuse counseling. Fortunately for our majors, this is one area of human services where students can obtain meaningful employment with only a bachelor’s degree. In 2010, a Substance Abuse Counseling emphasis was added within the major. After completing this emphasis and the
requisite internship hours and exams, students can be recognized as substance abuse counselors by the State of Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing.

b. Compliance with changes in the social worker training certificate (SWTC)

Alums who have been granted a SWTC and become certified social workers report being able to obtain meaningful employment. We anticipate that the State of Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing will make changes in the curriculum requirements for this certification. We are in the process of revising our curriculum to satisfy these anticipated changes.

c. Psychiatric technician

Several alums have secured meaningful employment with the State of Wisconsin as psychiatric or residential care technicians. The department chair has educated herself on the process involved in securing employment in this field and passes along this information to current students.

d. Advertisement of local jobs

The department chair reads several local newspapers and stays in touch with alums who work at human services agencies in the tri-state area. When job openings appear, she alerts current majors or recent graduates about employment opportunities. (Students are also given information regarding how to learn of job openings outside of the tri-state area.)

Theme D: Graduate Schools in Counseling and Social Work Have Heightened Expectations Regarding Students’ Completion of Volunteering, Internships, and/or Human Services Related Work Experience

Changes Made in Reference to Theme D:

a. Increased volunteer hours required

Before completing internships in their junior or senior year, students are required to complete 15 hours of human services related work or volunteer experiences.

b. More volunteer placements for majors

The department chair has worked with the Platteville School District, Family Advocates, Grant County Department of Social Services and a local assisted living facility to create more volunteer opportunities for students.
c. **Service learning**

Five of our courses now contain service learning components: Psychology of Adulthood and Aging, Techniques of Counseling, Advanced Techniques of Counseling and Psychotherapy, Child and Family Systems Therapy, and Human Service Work with Groups and Organizations. Valerie Gill-Mast, the lecturer for Human Service Work, worked with PACCE to secure funding to support her students engagement in service learning.

d. **Increased encouragement of student internships**

Through academic advising, correspondence from the department chair, and class discussions, students are encouraged to complete internships during their junior or senior year.

Impressively, all 2010-2011 graduates who applied to graduate school (but one) were admitted. The student who was not admitted was waitlisted.