

Psychology Session Notes

Disciplinary Sector Leaders

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Morning Session

1. The meeting began with some confusion about the task we had assigned to us. The confusion was due in large part to my failure to read the email message from Deputy Commissioner Santiago, which suggested answering the following questions in the morning session:
 - A. What courses would you recommend as foundational course for this discipline?
 - B. Are there potential foundational courses that should be offered at community colleges which are not currently being offered for this major?

2. Cathy Pride, community college team leader from Middlesex, took the initial leadership of the meeting and Deb Foss, state university team leader from the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Laurel Wainwright, University of Massachusetts team leader from Boston, contributed their leadership throughout the meeting.
3. Cathy distributed copies of the “First and Second Year Psychology Major (Foundational) Courses” for the Massachusetts state universities and the University of Massachusetts campuses.
4. Representatives from the state universities and the UMass campuses offered some initial reactions to the document, including the following.
 - A. The document seemed to contain too many errors to make it useful to the group.
 - B. The UMass Boston and UMass Lowell pathways do not include all of the options available to students.
 - C. Bachelor of Science degrees in psychology may require more courses outside of the major department than are shown on the Bachelor of Arts pathways.
 - D. The mathematics course required by the UMass Amherst psychology major is not included in the pathway.
 - E. The UMass pathways make it look like students must take all of the courses listed, despite the footnotes provided.
 - F. The state university pathways and the UMass pathways are not consistent in their format. The first column in the state university pathways is a number, indicating the number of required courses, and it needs a label. The first column in the UMass pathways is a general course title. The group seemed to prefer that the first column provide categories of courses, rather than simply numbers or general course titles.
 - G. The question arose “Are there course limits on the number of courses that may be transferred to meet major program requirements?”
 - H. Another question arose asking “Is there a certain number of courses that students must complete in order to be able to finish their degrees in two years after transfer?”
 - I. Some institutions may require a minimum number of credits outside of the major. This requirement may pose difficulties in transfer for students coming from community college programs that require a large number of psychology courses. Students may have more credits than can be transferred and applied to the baccalaureate degree. For example, Holyoke Community College requires seven psychology courses to complete its associate degree in psychology. While these students have a greater concentration of courses in the field, they may be less well prepared in general education core courses.
5. The group spent some time discussing the issues that the required psychology statistics course (not a mathematics course) poses, including the following.
 - A. Mathematics may be a prerequisite for most Statistics for Psychology courses.
 - B. The Statistics for Psychology course must be oriented toward the psychology major, preferably designated a psychology course, rather than a mathematics course.
 - C. In most cases, the Statistics for Psychology course must include use of and demonstrated proficiency with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).
 - D. In most cases, the Statistics for Psychology course must include familiarity with and demonstrated use of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) database (PsycINFO).

- E. At some institutions, the Statistics for Psychology course is a 300-level and therefore no community college credit will be granted to satisfy this requirement. One representative suggested that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) precludes transferring a 200-level course for a 300-level course, but several baccalaureate institutions acknowledged that they do that.
 - F. At some institutions, there may be a minimum grade requirement for the statistics course.
 - G. At many institutions, Statistics for Psychology may be a prerequisite for other psychology courses.
6. The group also spent some time discussing issues regarding the research methods course required by all institutions, including the following.
- A. Content and sequencing for research methods courses varies considerably at the different state universities and UMass campuses.
 - B. Community college research methods courses are often tailored for their most popular transfer institutions.
 - C. The research methods course must require use of the APA style, the academic format specified in *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.
 - D. At some institutions, the research methods course is a 300-level and therefore no community college credit will be granted to satisfy this requirement.
 - E. At some institutions, there may be a minimum grade requirement for the research methods course.
 - F. At many institutions, a research methods course may be a prerequisite for other psychology courses.
7. The group discussed the suggestion that it's not a matter of what courses are required, so much as it is a matter of the number of courses required. The group considered the following list of specific psychology courses for first and second years of a baccalaureate program.
- A. Introduction to or general psychology course
 - B. Research Methods or Statistics for Psychology course (not both)
 - i. Research Methods course
 - a) Essential elements for any first research course
 - 1. APA style
 - 2. Use of PsycINFO (not Psych ARTICLES) database
 - 3. Use of SPSS for statistics calculations
 - 4. If offering Research Methods, students should take Statistics for math requirement (will take Statistics for Psychology after transfer)
 - ii. Statistics for Psychology
 - a) Taught by the psychology department and not mathematics department
 - b) Use of SPSS for statistics calculations
 - C. Select two courses from the following content areas (the number of courses may increase)
 - i. Developmental (child, adolescent, or other, but not lifespan)
 - ii. Social psychology
 - iii. Abnormal/Personality
 - iv. Cognition/Learning/Educational Psychology
 - v. Introductory Neuroscience, i.e. brain and behavior

8. The group wondered if the discussion should be about areas of competency or categories of courses, rather than specific course titles. The group raised the question “What are the categories?” and “What courses fit into those categories?”
9. Institutions normally have a residency requirement for a minimum number of courses in the major to be taken at the degree-granting institution. These residency requirements need to be clear to prospective transfer students and their advisors. The residency requirement is important because it ensures that students meet with faculty members and receive professional development at the degree-granting institution. The group raised the questions “What is the minimum number of courses that students must take in the major at the degree-granting institution?” and “Is the degree institution-specific or a hybrid of multiple institutions?” Also, it was suggested that the Department of Higher Education (DHE) collect information about the institutional and departmental residency requirements at the baccalaureate institutions.
10. The group raised the questions “What are the APA standards?” and “What are the basic competencies required in the first two years of a baccalaureate degree?” The group considered that even if it could reach some agreement on the areas or courses that should be required, could it also reach agreement on the content of the courses? The *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* identifies the following comprehensive learning goals.
 - A. Knowledge base in psychology
 - B. Scientific inquiry and critical thinking
 - C. Ethical and social responsibility in a diverse world
 - D. Communication
 - E. Professional development

These learning goals are achieved not simply by one course, but rather by being embedded across the curriculum.

11. The group also considered the Educational Testing Service’s (ETS) test content in the Major Field Test in Psychology to explore whether its general areas might provide a guide. The test content includes the following.
 - A. Learning
 - B. Memory
 - C. Cognition
 - D. Perception and sensation
 - E. Physiology and neuroscience
 - F. Clinical/abnormal
 - G. Developmental
 - H. Personality
 - I. Social
 - J. Historical
 - K. Applied
 - L. Measurement and methodology

12. The group suggested that there may be macro issues that need to be resolved before drilling down to the micro issues. The macro issues include the following.

- A. University residence requirements in major
 - B. University departmental requirements for 300-level and 400-level courses
 - C. Maximum number of psychology courses community college students can acquire for the freshman and sophomore years of a baccalaureate program
 - D. University requirements for a minimum number of credits outside of the department
 - E. General education foundational courses, such as biology and statistics, that make sense for a baccalaureate degree in psychology
13. The group was intrigued by the idea of the Learning Commons described in the opening panel discussion by David Lavallee or Dan Knox from the State University of New York as a means to foster statewide discussion of academic transfer pathways among psychology faculty members. The SUNY Teacher and Leader Education Network (S-TEN) is described on its website at <http://commons.suny.edu/groups/sten-network/>. The S-TEN Learning Commons could provide a model for Massachusetts that could be helpful in promoting collaboration.

Afternoon Session

14. Dr. Santiago had suggested the group discuss the following two questions.
- A. How important are prerequisites in determining course equivalents in this major?
 - B. For biology, chemistry, economics, and psychology—Is the math content in math courses related to these majors sufficient?
- Instead, the group decided it would be most valuable to continue the discussion from the morning session.
15. Cathy distributed copies of “Popular Foundational Course Using MAST Numbers,” which indicated the number of community colleges offering a number of the most popular psychology courses, and a spreadsheet of the psychology courses offered at each community college and how those courses transfer to the seven comprehensive state universities and the four undergraduate campuses of the University of Massachusetts.
16. The group discussed the “Popular Foundational Courses” (see below) at the community colleges with the following comments.
- A. The baccalaureate institutions require a variety of human growth and development courses with focus on particular stages of life, such as child psychology and adolescent psychology.
 - B. Math department Statistics can be used to fulfill the math requirement of the MassTransfer Block, however, most schools will require that students take a psychology statistics course (after transfer if not taken at the community college).
 - C. At some institutions statistics and research methods courses are prerequisites for other required courses, which may make it impossible for students transferring without these courses to complete baccalaureate degree requirements in only two years following transfer. The sequencing of courses establishes a timeframe from which it may be impossible for students to deviate.
 - D. What should the content of statistics and research methods courses be?
 - E. Psychology departments with only one member cannot offer all of the courses that transfer pathways suggest might be taken at the community college level.

- F. Some state universities require a two-semester sequence in research methods.
- G. At UMass Amherst, Introduction to Psychology (PSYC 100) is the only prerequisite for some psychology courses, such as social psychology, abnormal psychology, developmental psychology and theories of personality. Cognitive psychology also requires statistics and research methods.
- H. The maximum total number of psychology courses required at the state university and UMass levels seems to range from six to eight.

The “Popular Foundational Courses” offered by community colleges include the following.

<i>Course</i>	<i>Number of community colleges offered</i>
Introduction to Psychology	15
Abnormal Psychology	13
Human Growth and Development/Lifespan Development	13
Social Psychology	11
Psychology of Personality	9
Adolescent Psychology	9
Child Psychology	7
Research Methods	5
Cognitive Psychology	4
Statistics for Psychology	2

17. A discussion of the spreadsheets followed, including the following comments and questions.

- A. We’re not looking at the bigger picture; we’re looking at the details instead of talking about the bigger picture first.
- B. The spreadsheets are inaccurate. Those who found inaccuracies were directed to bring them to the MAST contact on their campuses. Could the DHE provide a list of the MAST campus contact people to the psychology faculty members?
- C. What are the courses that the state universities and UMass campuses accept in transfer toward the baccalaureate degree requirements?

18. Cathy provided some historical context by describing the statewide compact efforts in early childhood and elementary education.

19. The group considered the core general education courses that psychology transfer students should take at the community colleges and concluded with the following recommendations.

- A. Human Biology with lab **OR** Anatomy and Physiology with lab **OR** General Biology I and II with labs (provided they cover human biology)
- B. Math-based-Statistics (Introduction to Statistics is not college-level at many community colleges)
- C. World language (students need to demonstrate intermediate-level competency for most bachelor of arts psychology degrees)
- D. Ethics

Notes prepared by Larry Dean, MAST staff member, with assistance from Cathy Pride.