**Proposed Changes to the Major in Psychological Science**

*Background*

There are four intertwined reasons why the department is making this request. First, only two current department members involved in crafting the current major are still teaching at Albion. In addition, the College has been undergoing a strategic planning initiative during the past two years, and the department would like to assure its curriculum is as congruent as possible with the College’s strategic plan. Third, the department now has a reasonable amount of assessment data to make changes based on those data. Finally, the current major is based on the St. Mary’s College of Maryland National Conference on Undergraduate Education, which was held in 1992. Furthermore, our external reviews, Jane Halonen and Ludy Benjamin, visited the department in 1996. Indeed, in June 2008, the National Conference on Undergraduate Education met again for eight days to re-evaluate the state of the undergraduate psychology curriculum. This meeting lasted eight days at the University of Puget Sound and involved 80 teachers from the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels of teaching. This curriculum-centered conference was a continuation of the meeting at St. Mary’s in 1992, with updates to the recommendations of that meeting. Based on these three considerations, the Psychology Department has come to C&RC with the following mutually exclusive requests:

 (1)                       to change our major requirements to begin with the entering first-year class in 2010, and

(2)                       to change the name of our department.

*The Current Major in Psychology*

The current psychology major requirements are as follows (taken from 2009-2010 academic catalog):

A minimum of nine units in psychology, including: 101, 204, 206 and 396.  
At least three courses from Lists I and II (at least one course must be taken from each list and at least two courses must be at the 300-level).

**List 1                                                                                                  List 2**

PSYC 236: Social Psychology                                           PSYC 241: Neuroscience I

PSYC 251: Child and Adolescent Psychology                   PSYC 243: Psychology of Perception

PSYC 265: Abnormal Psychology                                     PSYC 245: Psychology of Learning

PSYC 267: Psychology of Personality                               PSYC 348: Research in Behavioral  
 Neuroscience

PSYC 336: Research in Social Psychology                        PSYC 378: Cognitive Psychology

PSYC 351: Research in Developmental Psychology

Please note that some courses in Lists I and II can be offered as lecture-based or laboratory-based courses. Lecture-based courses are taught at the 200-level and have only one prerequisite (Psychology 101); laboratory-based courses are taught at the 300-level and may have additional prerequisites.

        All courses for the major must be taken for a numerical grade, except those offered only on a credit/no credit basis.

        Participation in the department's assessment activities is required.

Our assessment data suggests that the current major has been effective in helping students learn about the quantitative nature of psychology. Indeed, scores on the ETS Major Field Test have consistently suggested that, relative to students at other schools, our students are particularly knowledgeable about this aspect of psychology (80th+ percentile). In addition, student performance on presentation of their empirical projects in PSYC 204 (Research Design & Analysis I) and PSYC 206 (Research Design & Analysis II) suggests that they are learning to apply this knowledge to answer a “real” research question. That said, our students do not score as well on the “content areas” of the Major Field Test as they do on the quantitative aspects of psychology. Although students typically score in excess of the 50th percentile on the different content areas of the test, most years, there is often one content area on which students check in at or slight below that level of performance, and that content area is not consistent from year-to-year. Given the prolonged staffing restrictions on our department, we are able to offer a “bare bones” major at best. Students rarely, if ever, have a chance to take courses other than those providing broad overviews of an area of the discipline (e.g., developmental, neuroscience). Based on curricular and resource grounds, our students’ performance on assessment measures, as well as the College’s strategic plan, we need to change our major requirements.

**Proposed New Major for the Department of Psychological Science**

Required of all Majors:

1.    PSYC 101: Introduction to Psychology

2.    PSYC 204: Research Design and Analysis I

3.    PSYC 206: Research Design and Analysis II

4.    Plus take 2 courses from EACH ONE of the following three lists

**List 1/Social Science                                                                      List 2/Natural Science**

PSYC 236: Social Psychology                                       PSYC 241: Neuroscience I

PSYC 251: Child and Adolescent Psychology              PSYC 243: Psychology of Perception

PSYC 265: Abnormal Psychology                                 PSYC 245: Psychology of Learning

PSYC 267: Psychology of Personality                   PSYC 348: Research in Behavioral  
 Neuroscience

PSYC 336: Research in Social Psychology                    PSYC 378: Cognitive Psychology

PSYC 351: Research in Developmental Psychology

**List 3/Applied Science**

PSYC 304: Psychological Assessment

PSYC 330: Health Psychology\*

PSYC 346: Industrial/Organizational Psychology\*

PSYC 353: Adolescence

PSYC 354: Lifespan Developmental Psychology\*

PSYC 380: Introduction to Counseling

PSYC 390: Neuropsychopharmacology

PSYC 395: Forensic Psychology

PSYC 396: History and Philosophy of Psychology

PSYC 398, 399: Practicum

PSYC 416: Senior Seminar

PSYC 389s: Special topics (e.g., eyewitness testimony, behavioral finance)

NOTES

1.                Students must complete a 200-level lecture class or attain junior status before starting the RDA course sequence.

2.                Student must take 2 classes from each list, resulting in 9 units for the major.

3.                All List 3 courses require at least PSYC 204 as a prerequisite.

4.                One List 1 or one List 2 class must be a 300-level level lab course (capstone for research/quantitative emphasis of major).

5.                Cognitive and Social labs offered once/year; Neuro and Developmental lab offered every other year and by permission of instructor.

6.                All List 3 classes must be 300-level (so a total of three upper-level courses will still be required); serve as a “thought-to-action” capstone experience.

7.                Student wanting a second upper-level lab may substitute it for a List 3 course.

8.                Practicum must be by permission of instructor only.

9.               All majors must complete the department’s senior assessment exam.

\*These courses are currently offered at the 200-level. However, based on student feedback and the nature of these courses, all of which involve significant out-of-class “real world” experiences, we are requesting, via the Course Change Committee, that they be renumbered as 300-level courses. These requests to Course Change are independent of whether or not these changes to our major requirements are approved by C&RC.

**Here, we discuss how these new major requirements are different from the current major requirements. First, we discuss the more general logic behind these changes. Second, we discuss the specific notes provided.**

*General Logic of the New Major*

Introduction to Psychology, RDA 1, and RDA 2 are the most basic of building blocks for any psychology major. Their content is extremely broad, and the latter two courses provide the basic methodological and quantitative techniques that are essential regardless of the students’ specific interests within psychology.

The “List 1” and List 2” courses are the same as in the current major. However, we have added the term “Social Science” to explain why these courses belong together in List 1, and the term “Natural Science” to explain why those courses belong together in List 2. Although this logic was always apparent to department faculty members, now it is hopefully more apparent to students and other constituencies such as their parents. Indeed, this distinction is one emphasized from the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education. In this respect, the department has been ahead of the curve.

 List 3 is a new list of courses. These courses are all applied in nature, taking “basic” information from courses in List 1 and List 2 and applying it to “real life” settings. For instance, PSYC 346, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, takes information from List 1 and List 2 courses (e.g., PSYC 267, Personality Psychology, and PSYC 245, Learning Psychology) and applies it to solving issues in the workplace (e.g., how to train different types of employees). Indeed, List 3 courses could easily be called, keeping in the spirit of the College’s strategic plan, “thought-to-action” courses. We intend these List 3 courses to serve as capstone experiences, something emphasized at the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education.

 With one exception, all of the courses in List 3 are currently offered. That one exception is the “Special topics” courses. These will be courses within a faculty member’s area of research expertise. During the past nine years, the department has been able to offer but two such courses (i.e., neuropsychopharmacology and adolescence), and these two courses are offered infrequently, less than every other year. We anticipate that we will be able to offer at least one such course each semester because instead of requiring two 300-level lab courses as we currently require, we will require only one such course under the new major, thus freeing up faculty to teach special topics courses. With the exception of the two aforementioned specialty courses, all other such courses will be new courses and will need to go through Course Change.

*Explanation of Notes to Major Requirements*

**1.**               **Students must complete a 200-level lecture class or attain junior status before starting the RDA course sequence**

Our PSYC 204 (RDA 1) class requires students to conduct an empirical study of their own design. Although widely acknowledged as a strength of this course, it presents a challenge because students have typically not taken many, if any, content-area courses (those from List 1 or List 2) prior to taking PSYC 204. Thus, requiring a content-area course before enrolling in PSYC 204 will provide students with a better grasp of the content of psychology to which they can apply the information being learning in PSYC 204.

We will allow students with junior standing to waive this prerequisite, as the PSYC 204 and 206 ideally should be completed by the end of the junior year. We anticipate this exception will apply to only a very small number of students. However, such students will likely have come to psychology after intending to major in other, related areas and have had ample coursework that will likely be helpful in navigating the empirical study required in PSYC 204.

2.                **Student must take 2 classes from each list, resulting in 9 units for the major**

In the current major, students must take only one class from List 1 and one class from List 2, with a total of three classes from those two lists. Now, students will be required to take an equal number of classes from both lists. We intend for this change to shore-up students’ knowledge of the different content areas of psychology. As mentioned previously, there has been great variability in student performance in the different content areas of the ETS Major Field Test during the past eight years. We hope this change in requirements will help improve and stabilize such performance. Indeed, the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education suggested that students receive equal exposure to both the social science and natural science parts of psychology.

**3.**               **All List 3 courses require at least PSYC 204** **as a prerequisite**

Because List 3 courses are meant to apply knowledge gained in List 1 and List 2 courses, some basic knowledge must be learned in order for it to be applied. Hence, we would like students to have completed PSYC 204 (which again, will now have a prerequisite of one List 1 or List 2 course) before enrolling in any List 3 course. That said, some List 3 courses have additional prerequisites.

**4.**               **One List 1 or one List 2 class must be a 300-level level lab course (capstone for research/quantitative emphasis of major)**

The current major requires two 300-level lab courses from List 1 and/or List 2. This requirement is unique among GLCA psychology departments and “aspirational” schools such as Furman or Davidson, in that, at most, these schools require one upper-level lab course. We believe that reducing the number of upper-level required lab courses from two to one provides students with more flexibility to explore their own interests. The addition of requirements from the applied science part of psychology necessitates something be dropped (assuming no increase in resources to the department, which based on the current economic climate will not occur any time soon). Hence, we believe there is significant diminishing marginal utility in requiring two upper-level labs, and reducing that number to one required upper-level lab will provide students with more options to tailor their coursework to their own professional desires.

**5.**               **Cognitive and Social labs (PSYC 378 and PSYC 336) offered once/year; Behavioral Neuroscience and Developmental lab (PSYC 348 and PSYC 351) offered every other year and by permission of instructor**

The methods of cognitive and social psychology employ a wide range of methodologies and statistical techniques. Indeed, for the student who does not identify with a particular area of psychology, one of these two upper-level labs will provide the greatest breadth of methodological and quantitative exposure. We will offer the behavioral neuroscience and developmental upper-level lab courses, but do so only once every-other academic year. First, the historic student demand for the behavioral neuroscience lab does not warrant more frequent offerings. That said, there are students who very much want to take this course, so offering it by permission of instructor should assure the students who do take it are serious about taking that particular upper-level lab course. Second, it appears that although there is great demand for the developmental lab, people teaching it sense students want it because of a perception it will be easier than the other upper-level labs (i.e., will involve playing with children). Thus, it is a default choice for many students. Of course, there are a fair number of students who do want to learn to do research with children, and for those students, this lab will still be available to them. They will need to explain to the instructor how taking this particular lab is congruent with their professional goals, and the instructor will have the final say in who may enroll in this lab.

**6.**               **All List 3 classes must be 300-level (so a total of three upper-level courses will still be required); serve as a “thought-to-action” capstone experience**

As discussed previously, List 3 courses are applied science courses. That does not make them any more difficult than List 1 or List 2 courses, but rather, they require an ability to take basic information and use it in a new setting. Along with PSYC 204, the 200-level courses in List 1 and List 2 provide that basic information. Thus, we are requesting, based on student feedback and the nature of these courses, that Course Change make Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Health Psychology, and Lifespan Development into 300-level courses.

**7.**               **Student wanting a second upper-level lab may substitute it for a List 3 course**

This possibility expands flexibility given to students in tailoring their coursework. Indeed, many of our majors do not pursue research careers after leaving Albion, hence one reason we are decreasing the number of upper-level labs required. For those students who are heading into research-focused careers (typically via Ph.D. programs), this option rightfully fits their career goals, and we will allow such students this flexibility.

**8.**               **Practicum must be by permission of instructor only**

This requirement has not changed from the current major.

**9.**              **All majors must complete the department’s senior assessment exam**

This requirement has not changed from the current major.

*Resource Implications*

We do not anticipate needing additional faculty to staff the proposed major in psychological science.

We will continue to honor the “old major” for students who entered prior to the Fall 2010 semester. However, we will allow those students to satisfy the requirement of the new major if they so desire.

**Proposed New Name for the department**

**The current Psychology Department requests that its name be changed to the Department of Psychological Science.**

*Rationale*

Given that psychology is a natural science, a social science, and an applied science, we want our name to reflect the fact that, regardless of one’s interests in the discipline, the scientific method is at the root of all area of inquiry within the major. Indeed, the layout of our proposed new major requirements stresses this fact, and we want this fact reflected in our name. Furthermore, the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education suggested that the name of “Department of Psychological Science” is a more-valid reflection of what occurs in empirically-oriented departments such as the one at Albion than “Psychology Department.” Such a change will paint a more valid picture of what students can expect as psychology majors. Indeed, some students who decide to major in our department because they “hate math” might be rightfully deterred from majoring in a discipline that history strongly suggests they will struggle with.

*Resource Implications*

There are no resource implications attached to this request.