

MSUM Psychology Faculty Votes to Adopt New APA Guidelines for Undergraduate Major

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In the fall of 2014, the faculty of the MSUM psychology department met to discuss the new *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major, version 2.0*, published by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2013). The Guidelines were revised by APA to serve as a set of recommendations for structuring undergraduate psychology programs and for assessing student learning in five key areas. These five areas reflect emerging best practices in higher education, changing cultural and societal trends, and recent shifts in workplace environments.

While the new guidelines reflect changing trends in the field of psychology and place a greater emphasis on skills that employers and graduate programs value from those earning a baccalaureate degree in psychology, a focus on core skills remains. For instance, the guidelines heavily emphasize the development of critical thinking skills, such as integrative problem solving, scientific reasoning and literacy, and the interpretation and design of basic psychological research. The guidelines also emphasize the importance of written, oral, and interpersonal communication competencies, including students' ability to effectively interact with others. Our undergraduate program strongly emphasizes these skills in not only our core courses, but also throughout the major.

The guidelines also recommend that programs foster the development of ethical and social responsibility, and encourage preparation for post-graduation professional

life. Ethical and social responsibility is addressed throughout several courses in our major, with a particular focus on scientific ethics in our required, writing intensive Experimental Methods course. To address APA's new student professional development goals, students in our Seminar in Psychology course will now have an opportunity to further explore their post-graduation career options and plans. Students' ability to engage in effective collaboration with others will now be assessed in this course, as well.

The updated guidelines continue to emphasize the importance of developing a broad knowledge base in psychology. To assess this goal, the MSUM psychology department has elected to use the *Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT; PACAT, 2015)*, which is a standardized measure of knowledge across several content areas in psychology. We piloted the ACAT last semester with a small sample of senior-level students enrolled in our Seminar in Psychology course. These students completed six subtests on the ACAT, representing core content areas currently both required by and available as electives in our major. Data from this pilot administration indicate that our students scored above the 50th percentile on all six content areas we assessed, compared to a national reference group of more than 5,000 students. Our sample's overall composite score was at the 71st percentile.

Full implementation of our new assessment plan is tentatively scheduled to



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take effect at the end of the 2015 fall
semester.