Undergraduate Program Review Report

A. **Review Information**

a. **Program Name**: Undergraduate Program in Psychology

b. **Review date**: August – November of 2019

c. **Internal Review Team Members and Chair**:
Dr. Olga Bezhanova, Foreign Languages and Literature (Committee Chair)
Dr. Maggie Black, English
Dr. Stephanie Hunziker, Pharmacy Practice

d. **Description of how the review was conducted**
The review team read and analyzed the self-study report produced by the department. As a result of our analysis of the self-study report, we formulated our questions and conducted extensive interviews with the Chair of the department, the Program Director, faculty members (tenured and non-tenured), students, and the Associate Dean.

The review team visited PSYC 220, PSYC 340, and PSYC 431 and conducted student focus groups outside the presence of a faculty member to facilitate a more sincere and unhampered response on the part of the students. Students in these focus groups answered our questions with great enthusiasm and offered a wide variety of perspectives on the functioning of the department.

We also conducted an interview with Dr. Paul Rose, Associate Dean of the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior, to glean his insights into the functioning of the department.

The review team conducted 12 interviews with faculty members, including the Chair and the Program Director. All of the faculty members we contacted agreed to be interviewed. We interviewed tenured and tenure-track faculty members to obtain a wide variety of perspectives from people in different stages of their academic careers.

e. **Program Director and Chair**
Dr. Greg Everett (Chair)
Dr. John Pettibone (Program Director)

B. **Previous Review**
a. **To what extent has the program adequately addressed the recommendations set forth by the previous program review. What patterns are notable? (Please consider the response in the self-study, all interview data, and the previous interim review.)**

The program adequately addressed the recommendations set forth by the previous internal review. In spite of spatial constraints and a loss of several faculty members (one of them recent and unexpected), the program is delivering high-quality instruction and maintaining good academic standards. **Our committee believes that the department**

should be commended for doing outstanding work at a difficult time and maintaining a spirit of collegiality in the face of these difficulties.

Recommendation #1: Improve the quality of advising

The department took to heart the numerous concerns about the quality of the advisement process expressed by students and faculty during the previous review. A second full-time advisor for the department has been added. Advising services have been moved to the SEHHB advising office, facilitating student access. In the student interviews conducted by our review team, students agreed that the quality of advisement has significantly improved, which is crucial for swift and successful progress towards degree.

Recommendation #2: Improve the availability of mentoring

The department implemented a series of measures aimed at facilitating access to faculty mentorship, such as increasing the involvement of the psychology club and Psi Chi in publicizing the program's mentoring efforts, instituting the Psychology Book Club, adding a yearly "Applying to Graduate School in Psychology Boot Camp," and creating a mentoring program for at risk students. Overall, the student satisfaction with the quality of mentorship they receive from faculty is very high.

Recommendation #3: Address space shortage

Space constraints remain an issue at the department. This is a university-wide concern that cannot be fully resolved at the departmental level. However, the program has made outstanding efforts to make the best of the space it has available, increasing the size of the PSYC 111 sections and sharing lab space. Some of the faculty members are conducting research online for student projects to alleviate pressure on the existing lab space. The faculty is to be commended for addressing this issue in a collegial and productive manner that does not have a detrimental impact on the quality of instruction.

Recommendation #4: Improve course offerings

The department significantly expanded its elective course offerings to address areas of knowledge that are of interest to students. An option to take the two required statistics and research methods classes in a single 16-week semester was introduced to alleviate the problems with course sequencing. Students report great satisfaction with this option.

Recommendation #5: Improve the departmental webpage

Since the previous report, University Marketing and Communications has taken over the responsibility for organizing and maintaining the departmental website. The students have not voiced any concerns over the functioning and the ease of use of the departmental webpage, which leads us to conclude that there has been a marked improvement in the navigation, content, and accuracy of the existing Psychology webpage.

Recommendation #6: Address the issues experienced by transfer students

In the student focus groups that we conducted, transfer students reported an improvement in their experience that stems from the program's streamlining of the admission process into the program. However, there are still concerns that transfer students express with the problems they encounter in their attempts to integrate into the program. These concerns are addressed in our review team's recommendations.

Recommendation #7: Improve minority representation among faculty

The program has made efforts to increase diversity representation of its faculty. However, faculty and students still believe that a lot of work remains to be done to improve minority representation at the department and serve the program's diverse student body. These concerns are addressed in our review team's recommendations.

Recommendation #8: Improve the Field Study program

Faculty and students alike expressed great satisfaction with the quality of the Field Study experience. Moving the materials related to the Field Study online has facilitated and simplified student access to this crucial experience.

C. **Student Learning Benchmarks or Outcomes**
   a. **Are the students meeting the program's student learning benchmarks or outcomes?**
   The program does assess student learning adequately. Although the program has remained mostly stable since the last review in 2010, additional courses and learning opportunities have been added to enhance student learning. According to the Department self-study as well as information obtained from the Department Chair, Program Director and multiple faculty, goals and objectives of the program are assessed in other ways outside of grades in courses.   Student progress is assessed through the Senior Assignment Poster Evaluation; faculty assessment of writing quality on senior assignment; and Undergraduate Assessment test. Since 2010, the classes offered as well as content have changed; therefore, the department is currently in the process of updating the exam to reflect current course offerings and content.   The Senior Assignment Poster is assessed by multiple faculty and includes evaluation of each student's written and oral communication. The Undergraduate Assessment Test is administered to all psychology majors during the last two weeks of their capstone class and assesses how students are meeting benchmarks for learning.

   Between 2010-2018, a majority of students have met or exceeded standards for all program goals and objectives. A decline in performance for Goal 1(Knowledge Base in Psychology) is due to a need to update the assessment, as the current exam was designed to assess the class offerings of the department around 2010.   The program is in the process of updating this exam to reflect updates to the program's course offerings and content. Scores on goal 6a (Written Communication) have been lower, as prior to Spring 2016, direct assessment of writing skills for individual students was not completed. To address this issue, capstone professors have been asked to rate writing quality for individual students based on a required individual paper. Data from the 2016 indicate that 99% of students have either met or exceeded program standards on this assessment. The program also notes the need to work on improving assessment of writing skills.

Based on this information, we conclude that there are program-level structures in place to assess student learning in adequate ways, as well as plans to improve the quality of assessments to evaluate student learning and program benchmarks.   We found that one of the strengths of the Department is the willingness of all faculty to engage in open communication toward the goal of continuous improvement and enhancement of student learning.   The faculty all seem to have a vested interest in student success in the program; therefore, we are confident that improvement in the areas needed will be seen.

b. **Do the curriculum and the courses support the student learning benchmarks or outcomes?**
Our review suggests that the program curriculum is based upon a solid core of knowledge that supports the entire learning experience for students.   According to the self-study report, as well as feedback received from multiple faculty, students have opportunities to apply knowledge and skills outside of the classroom in addition to required courses. Specifically, the Capstone Seminar in Psychology course (PSYC 494) allows students to apply their skills in research design and statistics and communication skills as they design, conduct, and analyze the research and prepare for formal presentation. Other learning opportunities include participating in lab or field-based research studies in collaboration with various professors; an internship course that allows for application of knowledge to a work setting; an elective course for students who plan to enter the workforce after earning a bachelor's degree; and a course for those who are interested in learning more about teaching and pursuing a career in academia. Additionally, students are provided with multiple opportunities to present research at undergraduate or professional conferences; each year approximately 30 students participate. Although the program does offer many opportunities for students to apply their knowledge through those previously mentioned, several students mentioned it would be ideal if more opportunities could be available. However, due to limited faculty availability and other resources, this continues to be a challenge.

The self-study report provides a grade distribution between Spring 2017 through Fall 2018, and demonstrates the rigor of the program by showing average grades range from 2.51 for introductory students to 3.34 for upper level students. Multiple faculty provided feedback that the statistics and methods classes are challenging for students and are an important part of the rigor of the program; the average grade in this class (2.79) reflects the high standards of the program. Additionally, Program Director Jon Pettibone noted that up to 60% of students exceed faculty expectations in performance on the capstone project.

A survey of students conducted in 2018 notes that faculty largely uphold "challenging-but-achievable" academic performance standards and "create classroom experiences that require critical thinking." The survey also notes that students often encounter opportunities for participation in oral presentations, exams, research papers, group projects in classes. Lastly, 75% of the students surveyed indicated that they spend four to five or more hours per week outside of class to prepare for a typical psychology course. Faculty were also surveyed in 2018 and noted that they felt strongly that the program prepares students for graduate studies and high quality of the required classes in the program.

c. **Does the environment support student learning benchmarks or outcomes?**

It is clear from our review that limited classroom and lab space continue to be issues. This was also noted to be an issue in the previous review from 2010. The Department seems to cope well with these limitations; they have held classes in other buildings, and identified additional lab space in their own building, which is three floors up from their Department. Still, the limitations in space do influence the number of research opportunities available for students, as faculty do not have the resources (or space) to conduct desired research projects. One group of students noted the limitations of clinical opportunities available to students, and our committee strongly agrees that this is likely due to lack of resources.

According to the Department Chair Greg Everett as well as other faculty, a lack of faculty continues to be an issue. Most members of the Department are overworked due to a recent decrease in available faculty; however, all members of the Department have worked well together to support the teaching needs of the Department. Because of the increase in teaching load and other responsibilities, time for research has been lacking and therefore further limiting available these potential learning opportunities for students.

Evidence suggests that the faculty members are providing adequate mentoring for students. One faculty member noted that all faculty are dedicated to helping students and prioritize their learning. This was echoed upon interviews with students, who noted always receiving good feedback from faculty, good accessibility, and the program makes a concerted effort to provide hands-on experiences for students. However, due to the limitations of available faculty, we believe this part of the program could be improved.

Advising was reported as an area for improvement in the previous review from 2010, and it appears this has significantly improved in recent years. Multiple faculty and students raved about the advisors for this program. Students specifically noted that the advisors have been excellent, providing specific expectations and program requirements. The students also noted that the advisors are very hands-on and make the process for transfer students smooth and less stressful than other programs.

The program sets standards of excellence in various ways. Since the major is designed to be open to a wide variety of students, a relatively low GPA requirement of 2.25. The program prepares students to conduct research through various courses and learning opportunities, which contributes to setting a standard of excellence for all students. All students are required to complete a two-semester sequence of research design and statistics, and there is a 400 level statistics class for students who want to further develop research skills. Students are required to achieve a "C" or better in these and all other required courses and are only allowed to re-take a course once. Public recognition of students' achievements also contributes to setting a standard of excellence for students; the faculty are dedicated to providing such opportunities for students and highlight these achievements publicly through social media.

D. **Enrollment and Retention**
   a. **Is the program serving an adequate number of students to ensure its sustainability?**
   Psychology continues to be one of the most popular majors at SIUE and the region's

largest producer of Bachelor's Degrees in Psychology. With regard to sustainability, however, faculty report having nearly reached a "breaking point" in terms of the need to replace lost faculty as well as the need for additional lab and classroom space such that they are unable to support any increase in undergraduate student enrollment.

b. **Does the program support student retention and completion of the degree?**
The psychology program has in place a number of strategies to support student retention. Most notably, John Pettibone keeps a log of students with low GPAs and reaches out to help support these students. Further, new advisors have been hired who have received glowing praise from both students and faculty.

On the other hand, the department does not presently have the resources to collect data on student retention and time-to-completion, especially with regard to race/ethnic, non-resident alien (international), gender identity, and ability status. Without this data, it is difficult to know to what extent the retention strategies the department has in place are meeting student needs.

c. **Do students have adequate opportunities for advising, mentoring, and collaboration?**
Yes. Despite having lost a number of tenure-track faculty in recent years, the psychology program has done an admirable job both taking steps to improve advising and to provide mentoring and collaboration opportunities to students. Students who participated in our focus groups reported that the newly-hired advisors have been available, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, noting a marked improvement in advising. Students likewise reported that faculty are approachable and available and that there are ample opportunities to take part in faculty research.

On the other hand, faculty have expressed concern that—as a result of regularly teaching overload courses—they have less time to dedicate to working with students individually.

d. **Does the faculty have adequate support and resources to be successful in their teaching, research, and service opportunities?**
While faculty overwhelmingly expressed feeling supported by their department, there is unilateral concern about the need for more—and more diverse—faculty, as well as lab and classroom space. Because lost faculty have not been replaced in recent years, tenure-track faculty are teaching extra courses and taking on more service assignments which, in addition to limiting the amount of time that can be dedicated to working with students, limits the extent to which faculty can conduct their research and engage in service work.

E. **Overall Strengths (1 paragraph)**
Our review committee identified several strengths of this program that are worth noting. First, all students report being very happy with the program, noting faculty who are dedicated to teaching and easily accessible. The students also reported that faculty provide strong diversity support. Second, the collegiality of the Department is outstanding; all faculty interviewed noted always offering full support to members of the Department when needed. A recent decrease in faculty has led to increased teaching requirements for most faculty while supporting the needs of other faculty members, and this has been done with ease. Many of the non-tenure track faculty report excellent mentorship from tenure-track faculty. Multiple faculty noted a major strength is having a

valuable administrative support team for the Department, particularly in light of the recent changes within the department. Lastly, many faculty members reported increased comfort with the program's stability since electing a new Department Chair. We believe that continued collegiality of the department and faculty dedication to students is essential to the continued success of this program.

F. **Overall Opportunities for Improvement (1 paragraph)**

Both faculty and administration have expressed a belief that the program is now working at capacity and that further growth in terms of student enrollment is neither recommended nor possible unless a significant increase in resources, space, faculty, and administrative personnel is provided. Until such a time that this becomes possible and desirable, the program should concentrate on providing high-quality instruction that it currently offers. It is crucial to avoid faculty burnout that occurs as a result of high workloads and ever-increasing service engagements. The department should explore every venue to decrease the administrative and service load on faculty. The program's sustained investment into fostering collegiality has allowed to prevent burnout in many cases, yet there might be a limit to how much external pressure the faculty and administrative personnel can absorb.

G. **Major findings and specific recommendations <u>with rationales</u>.**

Recommendation #1: Pursue an opportunity to use the Faculty Strategic Hire Initiative (FSHI) funds to hire two under-represented faculty for the 2019-2020 academic year. Should that request not be granted, continue to submit requests in subsequent years.

Rationale: Our review team finds that almost all faculty members and several of the students believe that the program urgently needs to improve minority representation among faculty. The program has a robust representation of African American students that stands at 17,3%, which is above the SIUE average of 13,4%. The program is to be commended for its success with attracting and serving minority students. At the same time, in order to continue fulfilling this crucial mission, the program needs to increase its efforts to conduct diversity-oriented faculty searches. The report titled "Faculty Cluster Hiring for Diversity and Institutional Climate" that was released in 2015 by the Coalition for Urban Serving Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the Association of American Medical Colleges demonstrates that hiring a single minority faculty member is significantly less productive in terms of guaranteeing long-term expansion of minority representation than hiring two or more. As the Virginia Commonwealth University's report on strategic hiring demonstrates, "because programs often become complacent after hiring their first ethnic minority, or opportunities for new hires become limited because of the lack of available resources, programs need at the outset to establish search goals for recruiting multiple members of ethnic minorities to their academic units. In turn, preparing the position announcement to convey the goal of filling two or more positions with ethnic minority faculty will serve a useful recruitment purpose. This will let potential minority candidates anticipate the presence of other minority faculty, who would provide support for dealing with the negative forces of tokenism or be available for discussing shared concerns." [See more at: http://www.ccas.net/files/ADVANCE/VCU%20Expand%20the%20Pool.pdf]

Recommendation #2: Integrate scaffolded, low-stakes writing activities into a variety of courses to help improve students' writing skills.

Rationale: Several faculty members and some students expressed concern with the lack of opportunities for students to improve their writing skills. As the size of sections increased to compensate for limited classroom space, it became impossible for faculty to integrate as much writing into the required courses as would be desirable and useful to students' performance. The self-study indicates that the departmental assessment of written communication skills shows problems in this area. While it is possible, as the self-study suggests, that this is, in part, a result of the manner in which writing is evaluated, it is also true that students and faculty alike signaled a desire for more opportunities to work on the written skills. In order to improve students' writing skills without overburdening the faculty, we recommend integrating shorter, scaffolded, low-stakes writing activities into a variety of courses that would not require the same kind of time investment into grading as a full-length essay.

Recommendation #3: Pursue a method to track retention and time-to-completion, especially with regard to race/ethnic, non-resident alien (international), gender identity, and ability status.

Rationale: From numerous conversations with faculty and administration, it became clear that providing faculty with a way to access this data would be beneficial for retention efforts. Currently, the program makes commendable and visible efforts to improve retention and reach out to students who are at risk of failing. At the same time, it would be useful to have access to data that makes it clear which categories of students are more at risk of failing in order to tailor retention efforts specifically to the needs of each group.

Recommendation #4: More support for transfer students to ensure smooth integration into the program and a swift progress towards degree completion.

Rationale: As noted in the previous sections, the department has made great strides in improving the experience of transfer students and providing the help they need to integrate into the program. However, in the review committee's conversations with student focus groups, the difficulties experienced by transfer students were a constant area of concern. Many transfer students complained of an inability to navigate program requirements and experiencing extended time-to-degree as a result. While conducting a Transfer Welcome Night activity is a highly valuable and commendable initiative, it is not always accessible to all transfer students in need of guidance as to how to integrate into the program. As the self-study recognizes, transfer students experience a slightly longer time to completion and constitute the majority of students whose GPA drops below 2.25 in the 1st semester or two of attending SIUE. This might be prevented with creating a specific series of measures aimed at facilitating the transfer students' progress to degree within the program.

Recommendation #5: As a very large department with high enrollments, it is crucial to have regular meetings for those who teach sequenced courses and different sections of the senior project in order to ensure that the program stays consistent/coordinated.

Rationale: As the largest producer of undergraduate psychology graduates in the region over an 8-year time period and the third-largest degree-granting program at SIUE, the department offers a variety of sequenced courses (such as PSYC 111, 220, 221, and 494) and several sections of the capstone experience (PSYC 494). Several faculty members and students have expressed a desire for a better integration of sequenced courses that could be achieved through a start-of-semester meeting among the faculty members who teach these courses to discuss the material covered in each and avoid overlap. A meeting among the faculty members who teach different sections of the capstone course would also be helpful to ensure the uniformity of standards across sections.

Recommendation #6: Explore the possibility of making service assignments and summer teaching opportunities more equitable across tenured and untenured faculty.

Rationale: Overall, faculty members are very satisfied with the collegial environment at the department and with their relationship with the departmental administration. While most perceive the process of assigning service duties as fundamentally fair, there is an extra layer of hardship imposed on the program by the fact that this is a go-to department for external service obligations. To give an example, non-tenured faculty members often feel overburdened and pulled away from their research and teaching obligations by the requests from students from other departments to supervise interdisciplinary research projects. It might be advisable to put a mechanism in place that caps the number of such projects an untenured faculty member can take on to avoid creating a detrimental impact on a faculty member's tenure prospects. The review committee also suggests that the mechanism of assigning summer teaching should be reevaluated in order to make it more equitable.

Recommendation #7: Explore the possibility of finding more clinical opportunities for undergraduate students.

Rationale: Because of the nature of the program, having access to a wide variety of clinical opportunities is crucial for student success. In our focus groups, many students expressed concern with the availability of such opportunities. Several students also mentioned that their friends had left SIUE for other colleges or chosen other colleges over SIUE at the time of making enrollment decisions because of their belief that other schools do better at providing clinical opportunities. Many students believe that lack of such opportunities will negatively affect their capacity to be admitted to graduate school or to succeed in the job market.

H. Rating with Rationale

The review committee has concluded that the Undergraduate Program in Psychology deserves a rating of **Exemplary**, defined as "Significant developed outcomes and strengths across all or most elements, no weaknesses that are correctable." **Our committee believes that the department should be commended for doing outstanding work in spite of significant and often painful space and personnel constraints and maintaining a spirit of collegiality in the face of these difficulties.** In the process of conducting our review, the committee has uncovered no serious issues that arise from the internal functioning of the department. The faculty and students alike report a profound sense of contentment with the quality of instruction and support that the department provides.