PSYCHOLOGY RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL REVIEW
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The psychology department is very pleased with the external review report rendered by four eminent psychologists at top tier universities. Overall, the reviewers affirmed the excellence of the department and our strategic plan to maintain the strength of our foundational areas while enhancing and broadening interconnections among programs and links between the department and other units on campus. The reviewers also articulated the challenges in pursuing interdisciplinary activities in stating: *Interdisciplinary activities are only successful if they are strongly rooted in the excellence of each of the contributing disciplines. Thus, a focus on interdisciplinary research requires nurturing each of the participating fields of inquiry. Core disciplines cannot be ignored in the pursuit of interdisciplinary work, but attention to each core should not stifle the interdisciplinary activity.* The department fully embraces this perspective.

Most importantly, the review committee made a number of useful suggestions for enhancing the department and moving it toward its goals. The vast majority of the reviewers’ suggestions involved ways to foster more connections within the department itself (i.e., across our traditional program areas), but they also suggested ways to enhance links to other units on campus. Furthermore, the reviewers commented on the department’s treatment of junior faculty and the department’s diversity. Each of the recommendations and issues raised was considered carefully in a series of meetings conducted with subgroups of faculty. In all, approximately 20 hours of meetings were held. Below, the key issues raised by the external reviewers and the department’s response are described.

I. **Strengthening Cross Cutting Links Within Psychology and Across the Campus**

1. The reviewers suggested that the psychology department continue and increase its efforts to pursue a department-wide perspective rather than an area-centric approach by: a) having search committees constituted of faculty from multiple areas, b) hiring faculty who work across areas, c) having a structure for our cross-cutting programs, d) holding more department-wide colloquia, e) exposing faculty to the work of graduate students outside their areas, f) admitting graduate students who wish to work across area boundaries, g) allowing more teaching of cross area courses, and h) developing a faculty lounge to facilitate faculty interaction. We respond to these suggestions in the following ways:

a) For the past 20 years, faculty search committees have included members from 3 different areas of the department. This system works well and will be continued.

b) Although the reviewers are correct in noting that faculty hires have traditionally been made within program areas, this has not been true more recently. Over the past three years the department has been in a rebuilding mode after suffering a significant loss in faculty size over the last decade. Approximately 70% of the positions for which we have searched during the past 3 years have *not* been targeted for particular areas. Rather, these searches were conducted under one of our three cross cutting initiatives (health, judgment and decision making, and integrative neuroscience). In addition, one search was conducted in collaboration with the Institute for Behavioral Medicine Research within the College of
Medicine. The newly hired individuals are expected to work with students in multiple program areas.

c) With respect to our three cross-cutting initiatives, the chair will appoint a faculty leader for each topic. These leaders will convene a meeting of relevant faculty and assess interest in activities such as hosting external speakers, conducting periodic brown bag research meetings, and developing a graduate minor. The department will provide the necessary resources for these activities.

d) Although the field of psychology has become more specialized over time and it is stimulating to hear cutting edge talks in one’s area, the department agreed that it was also desirable to bring in speakers who would have a broader appeal to a wider variety of faculty and students. We will now host at least one department-wide speaker each quarter with an associated reception following the talk open to all interested faculty and students.

e) To expose the faculty to the research of students in different areas, the department will mount a graduate student “data blitz” each year. The chair will invite graduate students who have defended a masters thesis in a given 12 month period to present a brief (5 minute) overview of their work to the full faculty followed by a reception. This will ensure that over time faculty become aware of what their colleagues in the department are doing.

f) In order to accommodate prospective students who wish to work with faculty across different areas, the department’s stipends committee will set aside a number of funded slots for new students who express an interest in cross area training. Prospective students will be brought to the overall department admissions committee by faculty pairs (or trios) and an individualized program of study will be worked out for the student. Alternatively, some of these students might wish to train within the purview of a given area training program but have as a primary advisor a faculty member outside of their training area. This will also be permitted under the new system of allocating graduate positions.

g) Although the external reviewers recommended more faculty involvement in cross area teaching, it turned out in discussions that impediments to this were more perceived than real. When it was clarified that the only stipulations involved (1) making sure the courses would draw sufficient enrollment to justify having two faculty members involved, and (2) the addition of new courses would not harm the undergraduate curriculum, concerns about this disappeared.

h) To provide space for faculty across areas to converse on an informal level, the department will create a discussion/lounge space next year on a trial basis.

2. The reviewers noted that the department does an excellent job in training and placing its graduate students, but that these students should have more exposure to work outside their individual program areas. To facilitate this, they suggested that graduate students be encouraged to: a) work with faculty outside their areas, b) take courses from faculty outside their own areas and courses taught by faculty from multiple areas, c) take a departmental proseminar, and d) routinely include faculty from outside their areas on their graduate committees.
a) To expose students to work outside of their primary advisor’s lab, students will be assigned a secondary advisor upon matriculation to the university. They will be encouraged to conduct work with this secondary advisor at some point after their first year. Ideally, this project would involve a collaboration between the student’s primary advisor and a faculty member from another area. Indeed, there are already a number of students doing this and the pattern is an increasingly popular one.

b) Our graduate curriculum already offers some courses involving material from multiple areas (e.g., cognitive development) as well as courses that span areas (e.g., decision making). These courses enroll students from multiple areas of the department. In addition, at the urging of the department’s graduate studies committee, area graduate requirements have been streamlined to allow students to take more courses outside of their own areas. Perhaps the most important new cross area course will be a forthcoming one that deals with brain imaging and the use of the new 3T magnet for research. This course is likely to enroll students across all areas of the department (and many departments) and therefore provide an important venue for cross area and interdisciplinary ideas to be discussed and worked out.

c) Department members had many different ideas about how to implement student exposure to all of the different areas of psychology. These ranged from a May term course in which graduate students from different areas would present their research and provide tours of their mentors’ labs to a year long course in which faculty from different areas would make research presentations. The department’s graduate studies committee will be charged with investigating and coming up with a mechanism to achieve the goal of exposing graduate students to the breadth of work that takes place in the department.

d) To follow the recommendation that students have faculty from outside their area involved in formal training, graduate students will be required to have an outside area member on their masters, comprehensive exam, or dissertation committee. Which committee or committees makes the most sense will vary from student to student.

3. Although the reviewers noted that there were numerous examples of work being done by psychology department faculty in collaboration with other units on campus, they offered a few suggestions for increasing this further including a) encouraging more courses in collaboration with other departments, and b) reducing the perception that interdisciplinary work was less valued than disciplinary work.

a) In order to increase the likelihood that cross department (and cross area) courses can be offered, the department’s policy on interdisciplinary courses will be publicized among all faculty. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that as the undergraduate psychology major was converted from quarters to semesters, fewer required area courses were proposed for undergraduates. These modifications to the curriculum will allow for the development and offering of new cross area and cross department courses.

b) Discussions within the department about the perceived value of interdisciplinary work revealed that the internal perception of lack of value among some junior faculty members stemmed largely from the relative absence of courses co-taught by faculty across different areas of the department and across different units on campus rather than from any impediments to conducting and valuing interdisciplinary research per se. Misperceptions about the possibilities for co-taught courses have been rectified.
II. Improving Mentoring of Junior Faculty

Although the reviewers praised the quality of the department’s junior faculty, they noted that improvements could be made with respect to mentoring the junior faculty including: a) developing a new orientation mechanism for new faculty, b) improving advising of junior faculty by senior faculty, c) providing more useful annual feedback, and d) ensuring that all materials requested of junior faculty for annual and tenure evaluations are necessary.

a) In order to improve the orientation of new faculty to the department, the chair will have an early meeting with each new faculty member to go over department policies and personnel, establish a mentoring committee, ensure that appropriate facilities and equipment are available, and generally get new faculty off to a great start.

b) The department’s mentoring system for junior faculty which currently consists of each person having a single senior mentor will be changed. After meeting with junior faculty, there was much enthusiasm for a two tiered system which will be implemented this fall. In the new system, each junior faculty member will have two mentoring “committees.” The first will be a generic committee composed of members from the department’s P&T reading committee which will meet with all junior faculty members at least once each year to discuss general policies and procedures. This will ensure that all are getting the same advice. Second, each junior faculty member will have an individual mentoring committee composed of three faculty representing at least two areas to provide both expertise and a more general departmental perspective. This committee will provide individually tailored advice on career issues and balancing work and family as well as report to the annual P&T committee meeting. Having multiple faculty from different areas involved in mentoring should improve the quality and consistency of advice given to junior faculty and produce improvement in the overall communication between junior and senior faculty.

c). With the new mentoring system, faculty will have more feedback than just the annual review letter and meeting with the chair. Our new mentoring system should allow all junior faculty to receive important feedback in multiple ways.

d). The Department’s P&T reading committee is currently examining ways to simplify and streamline annual reporting procedures for junior faculty. This will begin with a discussion among all faculty on the P&T committee about what information is truly helpful in evaluating junior faculty. For example, at what level of specificity are citation data required? Mechanisms for helping junior faculty complete their dossiers also will be explored.

III. Enhancing Diversity

The reviewers noted that the department has had some success recently in recruiting women and minority faculty members. As noted in our self-study, in the past two years 50% of the faculty hired were women. In addition, 20% of those hired were minority individuals. In the current year, four searches are underway and although no acceptances have been received yet, 2 of the 4 offers currently out are to women and 1 (25%) to a minority (African-American) candidate. To the extent that these searches are successful, the department will return to its historical strength in terms of women faculty and will exceed national norms with respect to minority faculty.