Members of the External Review Committee visited Ohio State University October 20 to October 22, 2010. During the visit they met with the Chair of the Department of Psychology (Richard Petty), and faculty in various areas of the Department (Social, Quantitative, Developmental, Cognition, Behavioral Neuroscience, and Clinical). They also met separately with all untenured tenure-track faculty, groups of graduate and undergraduate students, select staff members, members of the Departmental Graduate Studies Office, members of the Departmental Undergraduate Studies Office, Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences Gifford Weary and her senior staff, Vice-Provost and Executive Dean of Arts and Sciences Joseph Steinmetz, Executive Vice President and Provost Joseph Alutto and his senior staff, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School Patrick Osmer, and the Vice President for Research Caroline Whitacre. This report is based on those meetings as well as the extensive self-studies that were prepared by the current and previous chair of the Psychology Department (Richard Petty and Gifford Weary, respectively) with help and input from other psychology faculty.

The report is organized in the following sections:

I. Background

II. Current Interdisciplinary Activities

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I. Background

The Department of Psychology at Ohio State University has a long and distinguished history. Numerous internationally prominent psychologists have been on the faculty of Ohio State or received their training at OSU, including Carl Rogers, Julian Rotter, Claude Steele, John Caccioppo, Walter Mischel, Tony Greenwald, and
George Kelly. The quest for excellence continues today. The Department has an outstanding record. The faculty are excited and ambitious. The proportion of faculty with funded research projects is outstanding. New faculty hires are all among the elite in their specialties. Given the size of the faculty, the Department teaches a remarkably large number of Ph.D. students (about 145) and has an excellent record of placing these students in good positions after graduation. The Department also carries a huge undergraduate teaching burden. Currently there are about 1800 students majoring in psychology, and numerous non-majors have contact with the Department when they take Psychology 100. Despite the large numbers of students served, the Department provides considerable personal attention to undergraduates. The Psychology 100 is taught in relatively small sections (80 students each). Numerous undergraduates also participate in the honors program, which provides research and practicum experiences. The faculty and staff should be commended on this impressive achievement.

Ohio State achieved its eminence in psychology by focusing on a number of core areas of psychology (social, clinical, cognition, quantitative methods, behavioral neuroscience, and developmental), and building strong research and graduate training programs in these areas. This was the “standard” model in the field of psychology for much of the twentieth century, as research psychologists worked hard to establish psychology as a core science discipline. Through those efforts, psychology became the prominent fulcrum among the sciences, positioned between the social sciences on the one hand and the biological and physical sciences on the other.

Having become a core science discipline, with the largest student enrollment among the sciences at many universities, psychology is now at a crossroad. There is much important work left to be done in the core areas of psychology. However, the position of the discipline at the interface between the social and biological sciences has also created numerous new and exciting opportunities for interdisciplinary research. Psychology is fundamentally concerned with human emotion, cognition and behavior. How we think and act is integrally involved in the solution of all major societal problems. As Steven Jobs well knows, modern technology is effective only if it is user friendly and people are willing to put the technology into practice. Efforts to reduce waste or shift to new transportation strategies are successful only to the extent that they can change age-old behavioral habits. Public health and preventative medicine work only if they successfully interface with people's behavior and encourage healthier life styles. The success of the most spectacular medical interventions or new pharmaceuticals is similarly limited by compliance with medical instructions and changes in behavior that promote recovery.

Psychology is now well positioned to extend the frontiers of knowledge by joining with allied sciences to solve problems that no one discipline can solve alone. Rising rates of obesity and diabetes will not be arrested without involving psychologists. For example, what psychologists have discovered about learning and memory can help design new educational strategies. In addition to the medical sciences, nursing, public health, and education, psychologists can now work effectively with linguistics, communication sciences and disorders, human development and family sciences, integrative biology and anthropology, molecular
biology and neuroscience, pharmacology, computer science, and biomedical engineering. Such interdisciplinary collaborations promise to advance knowledge and solve intractable societal problems.

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. This becomes a balancing act. Core disciplines cannot be ignored in the pursuit of interdisciplinary work, but attention to each core should not stifle the interdisciplinary activity. Learning how to nurture each core while simultaneously facilitating links between cores is a new challenge for faculty, departments, and universities.

The Psychology Department at Ohio State University has begun the tackle these challenges. The faculty recognize and embrace the proposition that interdisciplinary research and teaching is important for the future success of psychology, and they have taken a number of major steps in that direction. However, it is our opinion that they have not yet achieved a comfortable balance between nurturing the core and reaching out to allied disciplines. In the following sections of this report, we will offer suggestions to achieve these long-term objectives in a manner that will result in a more comfortable and productive balance.

II. Current Interdisciplinary Activities

The review committee applauds the Department’s priority on interdisciplinary research. Throughout our visit we heard about the many examples of collaborative research between faculty across different areas of psychology, and heard about research projects involving units outside of psychology. The interdisciplinary emphasis was infused throughout the self-study report in both an organizing and generative manner. For example, interdisciplinarity provided an organizing framework for the new hiring initiatives in Neuroscience, Health, and Judgment and Decision Making discussed in the self-study report. Each of these initiatives builds on strengths within the department as well as across campus, providing an opportunity to take the department into new research areas. Given the department’s strength in these areas and the relevance to the national funding agenda, the interdisciplinary framework positions OSU’s Psychology Department to continue being a top department and to move to “eminence.” We encourage additional investment of resources in these areas. In the next section, we suggest several points that will help the department implement these interdisciplinary, cross-cutting links, to maximize chances for success.

III. Strengthening Cross-Cutting Links within Psychology

In recent years a consensus has emerged within the Department that it needs to move from being a collection of area silos (or even independent labs) to being a group of faculty and students who identify with the Department as a whole. Some
progress toward strengthening the cross-cutting links of the Department in this way has already been made: “...a major new development is the increasing number of faculty in the department who are working with fellow faculty in the department across area boundaries.” But more progress is needed. Our impression from our meetings with faculty and students is that the potential impediment to a faster rate of progress does not derive from active resistance from members of the Department but, rather, from long-term habits of working independently rather than as members of the Department as a whole. We have some suggestions for strengthening the Department as an integrated whole—a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts—that will not only lay a solid foundation for the emerging interdisciplinary Departmental initiatives (e.g., Neuroscience, Health, Decision making) but also place the Department on firmer footing as it reaches out to engage other academic units at Ohio State in interdisciplinary research and teaching. The following recommendations are suggestions for strengthening the cross-cutting links, but they are far from exhaustive. Members of the Department can and should think of other ways to strengthen the Department’s cross-cutting links in a manner that takes advantage of the distinctive strengths of the Department, its connections to other units at Ohio State, and the challenges it faces in implementing some of these suggested changes (e.g., a relatively large faculty).

1. The first step would be to formulate a coherent vision statement about how to unify the department and nurture a Department-wide identity. The Self-Study stated that the Department’s overall mission and goal was to move from excellent to eminence, to enhance an already strong reputation nationally and internationally as one of the premiere departments of psychology, and to be distinguished in everything that it does. These are praiseworthy goals, but they do not constitute a vision statement about becoming an integrated and unified Department where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and where ground-breaking discoveries are being made at the intersections of different areas and levels of analysis. There is some discussion in the Self-Study about the importance of cross-cutting links but it does not appear until the very end of the report in Section G 4. Here it is noted that “the department will not move forward simply by focusing on the specific core graduate training areas that exist currently. Research in psychology is increasingly interdisciplinary both within areas of psychology and across levels of analysis...” The Self-Study also states that a subset of the new faculty hires will be appointed within the traditional areas but will be expected to work at the intersection of one or more other areas. This is a start. But it is not included in the Overall Mission and Goals section, and it does not provide a clear statement about a priority being given to cross-cutting links or how this might be achieved. Such a coherent vision statement needs to be developed and adopted.

2. Collaborations across areas have already begun, as noted above. Such collaborations can be strengthened by giving a higher and explicit priority to cross-area interests and cross-area research linkages—both when hiring
new faculty and when admitting new graduate students. The responsible search and admissions committees should have representation from the different areas as well as from the cross-department initiatives. The committee members should give special attention to new faculty or new graduate students whose interests and research would link areas, and these candidates should receive extra weight in the overall evaluations and decisions. If there are insufficient numbers of such candidates who have applied, then an effort should be made by the faculty to find such candidates and persuade them to apply. An additional tactic would be to make it clear when advertising for candidates, on official Department forms, and on the Department web site, that the Department is searching for individuals whose interests and research bridge traditional areas of psychological inquiry. The formulation of a coherent vision statement that unifies the department (#1) would be a useful first step in this effort.

3. When new faculty are visiting the Department to give their “job talk”, faculty and students from all areas should be encouraged to attend. These visits should be treated as Department-wide events and not as area events. Following the talk, there should be a reception that would also support Department-wide mingling.

4. Department-wide activities should be increased and attendance encouraged. The different areas are currently active in inviting speakers to give talks in their area. This is worthwhile and should be supported. It would be possible, however, for each area to provide at least one fewer talk each semester in order that a department-wide colloquium could take place. Because faculty and students are very busy already, we recommend a substitution plan rather than an overall expansion of talks.

5. Other department-wide activities could include having PhD students present their Masters talk in a brief form (posters/data blitz) in a Department-wide venue. There could also be a Department-wide welcoming party at the beginning of the year when all new faculty and students are introduced. To kick start the new department-wide identity, it might also be useful to have a faculty retreat that would repeat every few years.

6. We recommend more co-teaching of cross-area courses. The Department contributes enormously to the teaching mission of Ohio State and thus it should be possible to have some teaching flexibility. Faculty with a history of teaching contributions should be allowed on occasion to receive full credit for a course in which they join with another faculty member from a different area (and possibly from other Ohio State units as well) to co-teach a cross-area course.

7. More informal ways of creating identification with the Department and nurturing cross-cutting links are also important. Such informal interactions
would greatly increase if the Department had a comfortable and inviting lounge that housed coffee, tea, and snacks throughout the day. This kind of space would be especially useful for this Department as it strives to break a long history of identification with areas. The same space can serve as the location for receptions after Department-wide talks, and for receptions to congratulate faculty and students who recently received a professional honor or award. Symbolic expressions matter, and having faculty from different areas in attendance when someone is being honored will build identification with and commitment to the Department as a whole.

IV. Strengthening Links between Psychology and other Related Disciplines

For interdisciplinary research and scholarship to flourish in a university environment, it has to involve not only research but also undergraduate and graduate training. Furthermore, interdisciplinary scholarship has to be considered a part of the primary responsibility of the faculty and students—not an add-on to traditional work in the discipline. If interdisciplinary work is treated as an add-on to existing responsibilities, it will be a secondary priority, with the consequence that faculty and students will not likely take the risks that are necessary for the success of interdisciplinary endeavors. Making interdisciplinary work primary requires changes in curricula, teaching assignments, promotion criteria, and associated administrative structures.

In our conversations with faculty, we encountered numerous perceived impediments to the pursuit of research and teaching that cut across departments and colleges. It was not clear to us how many of these impediments were rooted in fact and how many arose because of lack of familiarity with available procedures and resources. Either way, the impediments need to be removed for a true interdisciplinary climate to evolve at Ohio State. The following recommendations are offered to facilitate that transition.

1. Administrative structures, or the perception of those structures, have to change to facilitate more team teaching. Team teaching has to be credited so that it is not considered a burden added to the current individual teaching responsibilities of each faculty member.

2. To facilitate the development of interdisciplinary team-taught courses, the current undergraduate and graduate curricula have to be re-examined to identify courses that can be dropped or offered less frequently to allow faculty to engage in more collaborative teaching activities.

3. Administrative structures and perception of those structures have to change to facilitate joint faculty appointments across departments. Some future faculty positions should be defined as specifically targeted at joint-appointments. Recruiting of faculty in any of the existing areas of the Department should be conducted by a search committee that includes faculty
with cross-cutting interests and at least one member from an allied area and/or department.

4. Administrative structures and the perception of those structures have to change to not only recognize but also encourage and applaud interdisciplinary research in promotion and tenure considerations.

5. Administrative structures and the perception of those structures around graduate admissions and graduate funding models have to change to be consistent with the interdisciplinary emphasis. More about graduate training issues will be discussed below.

6. Administrative structures and perception of those structures have to change to encourage the submission of interdisciplinary grant proposals across departments and colleges. This issue extends beyond consideration of how indirect costs are handled and includes distribution of credit to co-PIs, appointment of graduate students on cross-cutting grants, purchase and sharing of equipment, and collaboration in the assignment of research space.

7. Collaborative projects evolve from academic discussion. To facilitate interdepartmental academic discussion, funds should be targeted to support interdepartmental colloquia and visiting speakers.

V. Role and Treatment of New Faculty

Assistant Professors and other new faculty are key to the future success of the department. Special attention is focused in this report on these faculty because the existing assistant professors represent the future of the department. A few simple changes to standard operating procedures would go a long way to increase morale among new faculty, and would pay dividends in reduced retention costs. Our own experience is that clear and transparent structure for new faculty also facilitates recruitment of star faculty. Our discussions with faculty of all ranks as well as administrative staff lead us to make the following recommendations.

1. Provide a transparent orientation for new faculty about departmental norms and expectations. As with any organization, the department has a set of formal and informal rules as well as expectations under which it operates. New faculty do not always have a direct way of learning these procedures and expectations. A formal “Handbook for New Faculty” as well as a departmental orientation would go a long way to address these issues of transparency.

2. Formalize the duties of a faculty mentor. The mentor can play an important role in an assistant professor’s career. A mentor can provide feedback on which research directions to prioritize, feedback on grant proposals, help in dealing with difficult students, monitor an assistant professor’s committee
work, prioritize which conferences to attend, ensure that the assistant professor is being nominated for awards or society membership as appropriate, etc. There are individual differences in the amount of mentoring assistant professors wish to receive, as there are individual differences in the skill set of senior faculty mentors. We encourage the department to develop a mentoring framework that is flexible and honors these individual differences. There are many models of mentoring beyond that of pairing up an assistant professor with senior faculty. For example, there is a “zone mentoring” approach where faculty can mentor in their own area of expertise such as when a senior faculty member conducts a grant writing workshop for all assistant professors in the department. We encourage the department to be clear and transparent about the expectations for both the mentor and the mentee.

3. Make the annual evaluation more instructive and constructive. We heard loud and clear from the assistant professors that they would like better annual feedback. This feedback can go beyond the formal letter from the department leadership to bringing the faculty mentors on board so they can take part in delivering the annual feedback and constructing the plan for implementation of action items during the ensuing year.

4. The two reporting systems for annual review and for promotion and tenure portfolios (AAR and OSU Pro) should be streamlined and integrated. Faculty report spending too much time interacting with the two cumbersome interfaces. We encourage the University’s higher administration to consider the relevance of all the information that is gathered during the promotion and tenure process. If some information is deemed to have less value or be of lower priority, then that could be omitted from the portfolio. Items should also be identified that can be obtained from already existing data sources at the University so that an assistant professor does not have to repeatedly provide the same information for different purposes.

VI. Minority Faculty Recruitment

The Department as a whole has had limited success in recruiting minority faculty members and in one area, in recruiting women. Of course this may be attributable to mostly benign reasons (e.g., fields recruited in and associated ‘pipeline’ issues) or to issues on campus including the demographics of central Ohio that may limit the attractiveness of the department to minority candidates. These aside, the University administration is committed to diversifying faculty and there are areas of psychology in which racial and ethnic minority members (and women) may be more commonly found than others. And, some of these (e.g., health, decision making) include the cross-cutting domains the department wishes to support. It is certainly the case that health problems that differentially impact poor communities (e.g., diabetes, obesity, stress from uncertainty) have repercussions across the
domains that psychologists study. As well, it may be possible to consider cross appointments with the Business school and/or with the Medical center and/or with other departments in Arts and Sciences to make attractive positions for minority faculty.

The American Psychological Association has given considerable thought to the issue of how to attract and retain minority candidates from the job advertisement itself, to the campus visit and follow-ups. The APA document (http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/brochures/how-to.aspx) is thoughtful and well worth thorough consideration. They note that recruiting one’s own minority students is often a successful approach and perhaps the department could consider, if they have not already done so, if there are such candidates.

The department might consider helping to increase the size of the pipeline of minority members by offering weekend programs for students in largely minority high schools. Getting people familiar with the nature of psychological science, as well as with the campus may help to encourage a few people to pursue degrees in psychology and while this is a long term project, it should certainly help to make the department an attractive place for minority faculty members should they be interviewed. The MRI facility might be a natural draw for many students.

VII. Graduate Training in the Interdisciplinary Age

Given that interdisciplinary research promises major future advances, graduate training has to be designed to facilitate research collaborations. Scientists must be able to speak each other’s language in order to collaborate and at the very least, this requires exposure to domains of work outside the very limited one each person becomes an expert in. How to accomplish this at Ohio State?

We note one limiting factor: the extensive teaching required of graduate students. The mean number of years to complete the PhD is already on the high end at Ohio State in comparison to other comparable psychology graduate training programs. This measure lowers the national ranking of programs. We are also concerned about the CVs of graduating students. Although we did not get to see these CVs, our suspicion is that students with very high teaching loads cannot possibly acquire the kind of publication record that will put them at the top of short lists when other departments are recruiting. Although the teacher training offered to graduate instructors of Psychology 100 and Introductory Social Psychology is outstanding, at least some graduate students (those from labs that are not currently richly funded) may not enter the research arena on a level playing field upon graduation because of their extensive teaching responsibilities.

We offer the following suggestions to better prepare graduate students for success in the interdisciplinary age.

1. Students should be required to work in more than one lab and preferably to spend 6 months to a year in a different lab or, if appropriate, in a different area within psychology. A written research paper or grant proposal related
to that lab’s activities might be required. Ideally, the research itself would cut across areas and could contribute to linking different labs. This would not only create cross-lab social networks for the graduate students, but would also develop new ties among faculty.

2. Brief rotations might be established to quickly expose students to central ideas and methods within a domain. These can be instantiated as mini-proseminars (say 2-4 hours) in which a small number of students moves from one lab to another. It would be helpful if the students do not go in the same grouping as they move across labs, thus fostering greater knowledge of peers in other areas of the department.

3. The rotations might be organized around the cross-cutting themes which would increase the development of ideas about the themes as well as establishing students’ abilities to ultimately work across boundaries. Graduate students might also be encouraged to help organize seminars and journal club activities focused on cross-cutting issues.

4. The graduate curriculum itself could emphasize cross-cutting themes, such as a social-development training program or a social cognitive neuroscience training program. It could also include something like a proseminar series for all the graduate students in which each session addresses a cross-area theme such as decision-making or self-regulation and includes faculty who conduct research on the theme from different levels of analysis (social; cognitive; biological) and/or with different applications (e.g., mental health; physical health; education; business) and/or with different populations (e.g., children, healthy older adults, patients with neurodegenerative diseases).

5. One domain in which specific interdisciplinary training will be required is in the use of the Magnetic Resonance Imaging in terms of both developing researchable questions and analyzing data. The department and/or the Dean’s office may consider fellowships that are particularly targeted for interdepartmental and intradepartmental students as the cross-cutting areas are being instantiated.

6. We recommend having faculty representation from different areas on each graduate students’ PhD committee and instituting the requirement of a dissertation proposal defense. Having faculty representation on PhD committees from different areas (and possibly from related departments) would benefit the development of the proposed dissertation by encouraging exploration of the research question from diverse perspectives. Having an intellectually diverse dissertation committee, with a required proposal defense, would also give students experience in explaining their work to faculty from other areas—a skill that they will surely need when they graduate.
Finally, we noted at least two concerns about graduate funding. The first is summer support. Students reported anxiety about their funding for the summer. We also recommend that graduate students be offered at least four years of support when they are admitted, contingent on satisfactory progress.

VIII. 2010 NRC Rankings of Psychology at Ohio State

In our meetings with Senior Administrators, a question was raised about the meaning of the recent NRC rankings of the Department of Psychology at Ohio State. Briefly, the following facts need to be considered:

1. The rankings are based on data from 2005. This is precisely the year when the Department of Psychology had reached a historic low in the number of its faculty members. The rankings are affected by the size of the faculty. In addition, the shrinkage could have reflected the loss of senior faculty members who typically contribute more to the rankings. These conditions will change as new faculty continue to be hired and the faculty grows in seniority.

2. The Ohio State Department of Psychology had a range of scores on different indicators that was unusually broad; for example, the standard R Rankings ranged from the Department being 11th in the nation to being 85th. The source of this unusually broad range is not clear, but it suggests that there was some anomaly. For this reason, we do not believe that strong conclusions can be made from these data. The Department of Psychology at Ohio State has an excellent national and international reputation. We believe that an accurate appraisal would place it currently among the top 10 psychology departments at state universities in the nation.

3. As new fields within psychology develop, they begin with smaller representation, which in turn yields lower rankings on many of the indicators. This is ironic because it is the new fields that will in the future produce the great discoveries and advances. As the Department fulfills its new goal of being interdisciplinary and cross-cutting there could be some short-term costs on the ranking indicators, but there will be long-term benefits as these new intersecting fields become prominent and dominant. This is sure to take place by the time of the next NRC ranking (almost 10 years from now). It is important not to be sidetracked by an NRC report that already fails to reflect the positive gains in the Department of Psychology at Ohio State since 2005.