

Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): Psychology

2017-18 Academic Year

University of Southern Maine

A. College, Department, Date

College: Science, Technology, and Health
 Department: Psychology
 Date: May 31, 2018

B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and Title: Liz Vella, Associate Professor

C. Degree Program

Name of Degree Program: Psychology

D. Assessment of Student Learning: Program Assessment

Step 1: Identify the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

- a. Do you have your student learning outcomes published on your department's website? Not Yet.
 If yes, please indicate the url: _____
- i. If no, please list 3-5 of the most important student learning outcomes for your program. **What will students know by the end of your program?**
 1. **Quantitative Literacy:** Students will demonstrate competence in statistical computational skills; interpretation of graphs, tables, and statistical results; and ability to define statistical significance and differentiate it from practical significance.
 2. **Critical Thinking:** Students will effectively and accurately extract meaning from complex texts; demonstrate innovative and integrative thinking; analyze problems from multiple perspectives; evaluate the quality of evidence supporting an argument; develop effective arguments, employing clear thesis, acceptable evidence, and sound logical argument; and identify errors in psychological reasoning, including errors arising from psychological, social, and cultural influences on our own reasoning processes.
 3. **Meta-Cognitive Self-Regulation:** Students will attend to and monitor the quality of their thinking processes and academic performance; design strategies to produce desired changes in outcomes.
- b. Please identify **which of your student learning outcome(s) were assessed this past academic year.** (One or more of the outcomes and corresponding assessment plans could come from your department's CORE Course Blueprint(s).

1. Critical Thinking Skills
 2. Meta-Cognitive Self-Regulation
- c. Do you have a **matrix or curriculum map** showing when your student learning outcomes are assessed and in which courses? No

Step 2: Assessment Methods Selected and Implemented

- d. Identify which direct measures (other than course grades), that were used to determine whether students achieved the stated learning outcomes for the degree.

The critical thinking assessment tool that I used is entitled the Psychological Critical Thinking Exam (PCTE; Lawson, Jordan-Fleming, & Bodle, 2015), which represents a validated assessment tool for measuring critical thinking specific to the discipline. Students were asked to read 14 brief scenarios that involve scientific evidence and conclusions that are based upon the evidence. For each of the scenarios, students specified if there were any problems with the conclusions drawn and if so, to describe the problem. For each of the scenarios, there was a problem with the evidence interpretation (e.g., failure to use a control group, or making use of a biased/nonrepresentative sample). Scoring the PCTE involved ranking student responses using the following scale: 0 = no problem identified; 1 = problem recognized, but misidentified; 2 = correct problem identified, but irrelevant other problems also stated; and 3 = only correct problem identified. Possible scores range from 0-42.

Reference:

Lawson, T.J., Jordan-Fleming, M.K., & Bodle, J.H. (2015). Measuring psychological critical thinking: An update. *Teaching of Psychology*, 42(3), 248-253.

The General Strategies for Learning subscale (5 items) and the Clarification Strategies for Learning subscale (3 items) from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) was used to assess Metacognitive Self Regulation (Dunn, Lo, Mulvenon, & Sutcliffe, 2012).

General Strategies for Learning (GSL) Scale

1. When reading for this course, I make up questions to help focus my reading
2. If course readings are difficult to understand, I change the way I read the material
3. I work hard to do well in this course even if I don't like what we are doing.
4. I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the material I have been studying in this course.
5. Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish.

Clarification Strategies for Learning (CSL) Scale

1. When I become confused about something I'm reading for this course, I got back and try to figure it out.
2. When studying for this course, I try to determine which concepts I don't understand well.

3. If I get confused taking notes in class, I make sure I sort it out afterwards.

Note: Students are instructed to respond to each item of these inventories on a scale of 1-7, with 1 = 'not at all true of me' and 7 = 'very true of me'

Reference:

Dunn, K.E., Lo, W.J., Mulvenon, S.W., & Sutcliffe, R. (2012). Revisiting the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire: A theoretical and statistical reevaluation of the metacognitive self-regulation and effort regulation subscales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 72*(2), 312-331.

- e. Briefly describe when you implemented the assessment activity, and if a scoring rubric was used to evaluate the expected level of student achievement. (This information may be shown on your curriculum map).

The analyses for the current ASLP are based upon two years of data collection, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Data collection for this ASLP was painstaking, since faculty in the department refused to permit class time to be used to assess their students. So, online data collection became the default, since live assessment was untenable. I used my survey monkey account to gather data by entering the PCTE and MSLQ items into a survey. At the beginning of the Fall semester of 2016, I contacted the psychology department administrative assistant, Lin Wright, to request email contact info for students who had recently declared the psychology major. Beginning in mid-October 2016, these students were contacted through survey monkey with instructions to complete the assessment. A link was provided in the body of the email communication. Students were instructed to complete the assessment at their next convenience on a laptop or desktop computer. Students who had not completed the assessment within a business week were sent weekly reminders through finals week in December. There were a total of 60 students on this list for Fall 2016. I was able to receive responses from 22 students in total (37% response rate). This process was repeated for Fall 2017, whereby I was able to receive data from 23 additional students out of a possible pool of 38 new admits, resulting in a similar 34% response rate.

Next, data was collected on psychology major seniors who applied to graduate in spring, 2017. The same process used to gather data amid new admits was employed for the seniors across both academic years. I received a MS Excel spreadsheet featuring email address from Lin Wright mid-spring term of all psych seniors who had applied to graduate. Targeted email messages were sent out to these students in March 2017 from my survey monkey acct, with weekly reminders sent out to non-completers throughout the month of April. Out of 34 students who applied to graduate in the spring, I received responses from 19 students in total (56% response rate). For spring 2018, I received completed data from 16 graduating seniors, out of a potential pool of 47 students eligible for graduation (34% response rate).

Procedures and Results

I de-identified the dataset by assigning each student a subject ID #. I then scored the PCTE, using the metric described on the bottom of page two. The MSLQ was scored in SPSS via creation of averaged subscale scores for the GSL and CSL inventories. Hand scored PCTE inventories were entered into excel and opened in an SPSS master file with the MSLQ data. Sociodemographic data was also gathered for each student (e.g., age, gender, and year in college). Here is the demographic breakdown of the new majors:

n = 45. Age: M = 21 yrs, SD = 5.67 yrs; range: 17-44 yrs (11 men, 34 women).
 Freshman: 13 (59%)
 Sophomore: 3 (13%)
 Junior: 5 (23%)
 Senior: 1 (5%)

Here is the demographic breakdown for the seniors:

n = 35. Age: M = 25.7 yrs, SD = 7.1 yrs; range: 21-51 yrs (2 men, 33 women).
 Senior: 35 (100%)

PCTE Analyses

Of the new majors, 8 did not complete the PCTE, opting to skip over the scenarios and leave the questions blank. So, out of 45 students, I only have 37 PCTE data points for new majors. Likewise, 9 seniors also opted not to complete the PCTE, leaving me with just 26 data points amid the seniors. These data were analyzed via independent samples t-test, yielding a significant effect: $t(61) = -2.32$, $p = .024$. In accord with expectation, seniors demonstrated a higher average PCTE score (M = 24.8, SD = 8.0) when compared to their newly declared counterparts (M = 19.9, SD = 8.3).

MSLQ Analyses

Being as the MSLQ just features 8 likert type questions, all students completed the inventory. That said, a non-significant difference was observed when comparing newly matriculated majors to graduating seniors for the GSL ($t(78) = -.824$, $p = .41$) subscale, whereas a marginally significant effect was observed with the CSL ($t(78) = -1.89$, $p = .06$) subscale. In both instances, seniors scored higher than freshman on the MSLQ, but the difference only approached significance with respect to the CSL. Collectively, these findings suggest that the psych curriculum may be more proficient in augmenting clarification strategies for learning (e.g., how to persevere with difficult content) than general strategies for learning (e.g., how to approach studying for courses in general).

Step 3: Using the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning

- a. Briefly describe your unit's process of reviewing the program assessment results (i.e. annual process by faculty committee, etc).

No process is in place because the departmental climate has been hostile regarding assessment. I've honestly had faculty in my department converse right outside my office door and refer to my work on program assessment as "bullshit". However, the psychology department experienced three retirements last fall, which presents an opportunity to *begin* building a culture of assessment. At present, I am flying solo on program assessment, but this may change in coming years. For example, my lecturer Rikki Miller and I have been discussing the idea of her reformatting our history and systems course to meet capstone criteria for general education. This

change will not take place till Fall 2020. However, when it does take place, I plan to encourage her to incorporate assessment within the fabric of the new course design.

- b. What specific changes have been or will be made to improve student learning, as a result of using the program assessment results?

Given the broad brushstroke model of the data collection for the current ASLP, coupled with the findings that largely cohere with expectation, I do not see a need to implement any specific curricular changes at present. Rather, I think that the next step will involve focusing assessment on specific courses, rather than just reaching out to new admits and seniors via email survey monkey prompts. To this end, I plan to focus the next couple years of assessment on learning outcomes pertaining to experimental methodology, eventually working my way up to a more systematic programmatic assessment plan.

- c. Date of most recent program review/self-study?

We completed our most recent self-study in summer 2015 and had our external reviewers evaluate the program in Fall 2015. These materials can be made available to your office upon request.

E.Course Assessment Activities: Is your program able to report any assessment-related activities at the Course-Level... (i.e. created grading rubrics to use in required courses, examined student progress in entry-level courses, developed a new course, etc)? Please briefly explain any assessment projects.

No, not at present. My plan is to switch gears to a more concentrated assessment of my experimental methodology course offering (PSY 205/206). I need to decide which learning outcome(s) to assess from this class and whether to utilize an ‘off the rack’ assessment strategy of pre-post of students, comparing baseline assessment from the first day of the semester to assessment scores on the last day of the semester. I teach the methodology lab in a computer classroom, which presents a perfect opportunity to move forward with that design. An alternative, more labor intensive option would involve an embedded assessment of a given assignment from the course. Another potentially fruitful pursuit would entail analyzing qualitative data obtained from my lab students over the years in survey monkey regarding their experiences writing my lab reports. There are three APA style empirical reports that students must author every semester, based upon different modalities of research design (e.g., correlation, naturalistic observation, and experiment). On the day that each report is due, I have students complete an anonymous open ended questionnaire reflecting upon their experience working on the reports. The purpose of doing the assessment, was to give students the opportunity to anonymously ‘vent’, since the reports are challenging, but I was also interested in learning about their perceptual experience writing the paper. On the day that the first paper is due (correlational study on personality and environmentalism), I have students answer the following open ended questions:

1. Describe your experience writing this paper.

2. What was your most difficult challenge?
3. If you were to design this study yourself or were to do it over again, what, if anything would you have done differently? Also, feel free to describe any perceived limitations to our study.
4. Do you believe our results generalize to the real world? How so? If not, why?
5. Please provide me with any additional comments you'd like to add and/or let me know if there is some other topic you would prefer to be studying in the lab.

Students complete the same questionnaire upon completing their second and third papers of the semester, with the only key difference concerning the first question. Instead of asking them to describe their experience, I instead ask that they compare their experience writing the second paper to the first or the third paper to the first two, depending upon the assignment. This model should enable me to do a text assessment on reflection and self-assessment from the integrative learning AAC&U rubric.

F. Community Engagement Activities in your departmental curriculum:

a. Does your department have a student learning outcome that is related to any community engagement activities?

Not yet...but we will. We just hired a community and cultural psychologist who will begin her first semester teaching for the psych program this fall. Working with Dr. Gleason will provide us with multiple opportunities to augment this aspect of our curriculum.

b. Please indicate if any of the community engagement activities listed below are included in your program's curriculum, by noting which activities are required or optional for students in your major.

| <u>Community Engagement Activity</u> | <u>Required/Optional</u> |
|--|--------------------------|
| Student Research (related to a community-based problem) | Optional |
| Student-Faculty Community Research Project | Optional |
| Internship, or a Field Experience | Optional |
| Independent Study (community-related project) | Optional |
| Capstone Course (community-related project) | Not Yet |
| Service-Learning (course-based) | Not Yet |
| Study Abroad, or an International Program | None |
| Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related) | None |
| Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project) | None |
| Students/Faculty Community Leadership (advisory boards, committees, conference presentations) | Optional |

c. Please list any courses (i.e. EDU 400) that have a community engagement activity in your program.

Entry-level courses: N/A

Mid-level courses: N/A

Upper-level courses: PSY 400*, PSY 401*, PSY 410

*Note: Depending upon the faculty advisor, PSY 400/401 may or may not have a civic engagement component. PSY 410 is internship and always includes civic engagement.