

## **Meeting Future Challenges by Innovating Today**

### **2013 Department of Psychology Strategic Plan**

In their influential article “Mapping the Backbone of Science,” Boyack et al. (2005) reviewed citation data from over 1 million articles and identified Psychology as 1 of 7 “hub disciplines” characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinarity and influence on other fields. UNL’s Psychology Department epitomizes this notion with its valuable connections spanning the natural and social sciences, neural and biomedical sciences, engineering, business, law and policy, and humanities (e.g., history, language). As a hub discipline, Psychology will continue to be critical for addressing complex problems that face the citizens of Nebraska and the world. That is, an integrative understanding of human behavior is crucial for addressing complex world problems, such as identifying sources of disparity and discrimination and protecting the environment to addressing individual concerns such as health and wellbeing.

### **GUIDING VALUES AND VISION**

Psychology embraces the Core Values adopted by UNL in 2006. These values inform our decisions as we strive to excel in our missions of teaching, research, and engagement. Sustained efforts to meet this vision of excellence will provide our students with the education and experiences required to prepare them to enter the work force and meet the challenges of a competitive and global economy.

### **OVERVIEW**

The following goals reflect our continuing efforts<sup>1</sup> to meet these entwined missions of teaching, research, and engagement to the best of our ability given the resources that have been entrusted to our care. As with our missions, these goals are interrelated; investing in one will strengthen others. Progress towards these goals will build on our current successes, as well as allow us to more effectively leverage our strengths and resources to help our Dean and Chancellor meet their goals in research, recruitment, retention, and diversity.

### **GOALS**

#### **1) ENHANCE UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**Context.** Psychology is the largest undergraduate major in the College with approximately 824 majors and 350 minors. Our number of majors has been steadily increasing; a 2.9% increase from last year and 18.9% over the past 5 years. We also provide much teaching to non-majors. Bottom line—our SCH production is substantial. As we meet the enrollment and retention goals set forth, we expect, at minimum, this rise to be proportional in Psychology. Our growing undergraduate program is already too large for our current faculty size. This was addressed in our recent APR, and evidenced by our faculty to student ratios and class sizes compared to other departments in the College. Similarly, data available from Big10 psychology departments indicate an average of 28.9 majors per faculty FTE. Our ratio is 15.3% higher with an average of 33.3 students per FTE. With our current number of majors, 4 full-time faculty members would need to be added to reach the average ratio of our Big10 colleagues. The Chancellor projects 20% growth in enrollments over the next five years; the Dean’s target is 25%. As we meet this target, there will be a significant increase in demand for our courses driven by the increase in the size of the student body and a likely increase in majors to over 1,000. At our current level of efficiency, 6 faculty FTE would be needed to accommodate this expected increase; 10 faculty FTE would be needed to reach the support found in the Big10. Recognizing that we are already stretched thinly given the intertwined missions of the Department, adding faculty is essential to accommodate projected student growth and to meet the goals for increased research funding.

#### **Objective 1: Enhance undergraduate research training**

There are many opportunities within Psychology for students to conduct research and we provide exemplary

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<sup>1</sup> This plan reflects the collaborative efforts and input of the faculty in the Department. The ultimate preparation of the document was the responsibility of the Executive Committee. The document, in penultimate version, was distributed and discussed with the faculty members and GSA representatives of the Department.

undergraduate experiences that range the breadth of our faculty. Such intensive research experience allows us to recruit star students that facilitate our research productivity and visibility. Research experience is also an important recruitment and retention tool that can provide significant experience in community engagement for some. There are increasing examples of high school students who started in labs the summer before entering UNL, and transfer students who choose UNL because of greater opportunities here to conduct research alongside faculty. There is a high demand for research experience by our 800+ majors and we are struggling to meet it. For the cross-purpose of fulfilling our teaching and research mission, we need to meet more of this demand in a way that facilitates educational needs, while balancing and rewarding the significant investment in faculty and their trainees' time.

**Actions and Resources Internally Allocated.** To move toward meeting this objective, we will (a) make hiring plan decisions with this objective in mind, (b) continue efforts to increase grant funding that provides undergraduate research opportunities, (c) continue to increase practicum/internship (engagement) opportunities that complement research training, (d) enrich our colloquium series to encourage undergraduate participation, (e) develop more effective and efficient strategies to connect undergraduates with research opportunities, (f) increase efforts to train graduate students in mentoring of undergraduates (e.g., professional development seminars), and (g) revise departmental materials for consistency with College and University recruitment strategies ("Your Story"). We will continue to allocate significant resources and incentivize mentoring of undergraduates in research. Examples include faculty, staff, advisor, post-doc, and graduate student time, web content and development, general research rooms with computers and licensed programs for conduction of research and data analyses, continuing improvement of the participant pool, and undergraduate research awards/events. Also, our annual merit process includes a section on research with undergraduates so that these commitments are documented.

**External Resources Needed.** Undergraduate research experience is embedded with faculty research and intertwined with our missions in teaching, research, and engagement. There are 2 clear investments that will have the biggest impact on meeting current demand and start readying us for the expected growth to over 1000 majors. First, a cluster-hire of 3 to 4 faculty (above that of CB3) across the next 2 to 3 years will permit strategic growth in research capacity of the Department (see Goal 2) and hence provide additional labs in which students will receive research experience. This investment would allow a faculty member to serve as the Undergraduate Research Supervisor, who will lead this effort, develop additional instructional opportunities and seek further external resources to support undergraduate research. Second, increasing the number of permanent graduate assistantships to at least match the Department FTE will provide faculty with sufficient trainees that could help mentor undergraduate assistants. Additional advising support will be required to meet the projected growth. This advisor could serve as Undergraduate Research Coordinator, help place students with research teams and work with our undergraduate psychology organizations to provide regular research related activities. Additional space will be needed as faculty, graduate assistants, and undergraduate researchers are added. As we grow, there will need to be increases in operating expense support; there has been no increase in operating budget since the mid 1990s, yet we need \$15,065 now to have the same purchasing power as \$10,000 in 1995.

**Outcomes/Benchmarks.** A number of indices can be examined: (a) number of UCARE students (Psychology already averages the largest number of UCARE students); (b) number of research assistants in labs (course credit or not); (c) number of undergraduates as coauthors in presentations and publications; (d) awards/grants earned by undergraduate students; (e) graduation rate/time of students involved vs. not involved in research.

### **Objective 2: Develop an Applied Psychology track for majors**

Approximately 25% of majors are actively involved in research during the academic year. There are no less than 80 conference presentations by Psychology undergraduates each year, and about two-thirds of our

faculty have coauthored a conference presentation with an undergraduate in the past 5 years; one-third have coauthored a publication. The research experience they gain provides valuable skills that serve them well regardless of whether they join the workforce upon graduation or move onto professional or graduate school. Our strategic plan retains and increases efforts in areas we have current demonstrated successes. However, there is another complementary approach to attracting new students to UNL who would major in Psychology. That approach involves developing a new track for students—Applied Psychology. Although details need to be worked out and no decisions have been made, the bottom line is that this track would take advantage of our current strengths in engagement and prepare majors for careers that are and will continue to show major growth and demand—public health, criminal justice, mental health, industrial/organizational, to name a few potential examples.

**Actions and Resources Internally Allocated.** We have formed a committee to discuss the nature of this track, the potential shifts/additions in curriculum offerings, the internal strengths and resources that could be leveraged, and the external resources needed to properly implement and sustain this track. That committee's charge is to develop a "white paper" to share with the Dean in the Spring 2013 semester. Thus, we are already allocating valuable faculty time to this Objective.

**External Resources Needed.** This bold and innovative proposal to form an Applied Psychology track within our major will attract new students to UNL and provide them with the skills to enter the work force and meet the challenges of a competitive and global economy. However, a clear and continuing commitment of external resources are needed before moving beyond initial planning stages. The committee is likely to identify needed resources similar to Objective 1 (see Goal 2): a cluster hire of faculty, an increase in permanent graduate student assistantships, and additional academic advising support. Along with attracting new students to UNL, this track may appeal to some undergraduates that have not declared a major, thus helping with overall retention and time to graduation. If so, growth in Psychology majors would increase at a rate higher than the University or the College. External resources will be needed to meet this demand and to cultivate and supervise practicum/internship sites for the majors. Additional space will be needed as faculty and graduate assistants are added.

**Outcomes/Benchmarks.** Some indices would be the number of majors and minors and the percentage of growth in majors in Psychology compared to the average in the College and/or other large departments. We have not received data regarding retention or time to graduation specific to students who declare Psychology as their major; best estimates suggest we are doing comparatively well. Of interest as benchmarks would also be retention rates, time to graduation for Psychology majors (incoming freshman vs. anytime declared).

## 2) STRENGTHENING OF RESEARCH

**Context.** The hub nature of Psychology at UNL places our faculty members as integral to and leading several interdisciplinary initiatives and programs, including the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior, Center on Children, Families and the Law, Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, Law-Psychology, Minority Health Disparities Research Initiative, Public Policy Center, Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Initiative, Substance Abuse and Violence Initiative, Survey, Statistics and Psychometrics Core Facility, Systems Biology of Social Behavior, and Wiebling Project. The energy and dedication of our faculty to meet the research mission have been outstanding. Despite just regaining our faculty FTE from the mid- to late-1990s, we have shown steady increases in external funding submissions and awards. In the past fiscal year, just looking at federal proposals designated as research, we submitted over \$5.26M in proposals; we were awarded more than \$3.33M. These numbers do not count grant amounts credited toward other units for faculty with joint or other appointments, collaboration with Centers, clinical training contracts, or competitive state, foundation, or industry grants. Indeed, our faculty have been impressively successful at identifying and securing diverse sources of support for their research. To maintain and build on this level of competitiveness, we cannot be complacent. We need to identify internal

and external strategies to continue to meet our mission in research.

### **Objective 1. Increase strength and visibility of research in Psychology**

Across many metrics, our research strength, visibility, and productivity has increased over the past 10 years; these include number of publications and books, overall citations, invited talks, extramural grant submissions and awards. In this Objective, we build on current successes and continue to increase the strength and visibility of research in Psychology, keeping in mind the ever-changing landscape of funding opportunities and priorities (Nb. this has to be accomplished in a context of growing demands placed on a Department and its faculty that are under resourced and stretched too thin; see recent APR)?

**Actions and Resources Internally Allocated.** A variety of efforts are being implemented to increase research strength and productivity, along with external funding submissions and success. These include (a) making hiring plan decisions that build strategically on existing strengths, (b) refine and enhance our mentoring of junior faculty (e.g., system for feedback from successful investigators), (c) extend mentoring to mid-career faculty looking to re-tool or re-invigorate their research program, (d) increase support within grants for more post-doctoral trainees and Research Professors that can help in writing and proposal development/submission, (e) continue efforts to gain efficiencies in teaching assignments to facilitate research productivity, (f) coordinating and modifying space to further facilitate research, and (g) continue to encourage involvement in initiatives and Centers. Further examples of the resources we allocate to this objective include faculty, staff, post-doc, and graduate student time, our share of start-up packages for new hires, costs for reconfiguring research space for more efficient and impactful use, maintaining common use research rooms with computers and licensed programs for conduction of research and data analyses, maintaining the participant pool, making available travel money to present research at a conference. Additionally, the annual merit process includes a section for seeking and securing funding, as well as overall research performance.

**External Resources Needed.** Psychology is on the cusp of moving to a new level in research profile and visibility. The strategic investment of sufficient resources will allow Psychology to make this advancement. Given the entwined nature of our missions, this Objective is aligned with those describe in Goal 1: Increasing external resources for hiring faculty (in addition to those allocated to CB3), number of graduate assistantships, and operating expenses support will be critical. One difference, however, is that faster gains in increasing visibility and strength in research can be realized by hiring 1 or 2 Associate Professors with a track-record of federal funding in areas where we have growing strength. Continuing the College's support of interdisciplinary research, research cluster groups, and individual faculty (e.g., Enhancing Research Excellence) will strengthen our efforts.

**Outcomes/Benchmarks.** Indices of progress include (a) increased faculty FTE contributing to interdisciplinary research; (b) increased grant submissions and awards; and (c) increased scholarly productivity (e.g., peer-review publications, books, chapters, awards; invited presentations, consultation on grants from outside the NU system).

### **Objective 2: Enhance graduate program opportunities and productivity.**

Our graduate students secure top internships and competitive post-doctoral positions, as well as excellent jobs in the private and public sector, including academia. The number of publications from graduate students, along with success at securing assistantship funding (e.g., NRSAs from NIH, NSF dissertation improvement grants) has increased in the past 10 years. Strong graduate programs are essential for advancing our entwined missions in research, teaching, and engagement.

**Actions and Resources Internally Allocated.** Department actions here will include: (a) increasing the number and diversity of graduate course offerings in an efficient manner; (b) improving the teaching experience of students; (c) improving the professional development of students (e.g., "brownbag" meetings, overload or 1-h courses); (d) continuing to strengthen methodological training (e.g., statistics, neuroscience);

(e) seeking additional external funds via research and training grants, fellowships, and contracts; and (f) increase mentoring of graduate student grant writing. We devote significant faculty and staff time to this Objective. For example, faculty put substantial effort in pursuit of grants and contracts; approximately 65% of our assistantships are funded by outside support. Many of the internal resources described in Objective 1 serve to support enhancement of graduate program opportunities. Mentoring of graduate students is considered in the non-classroom teaching and in the research areas of our annual merit evaluations.

**External Resources Needed.** Support needed from outside the department to ensure success of this priority includes: (a) funding faculty hiring requests will provide more training and research opportunities; (b) providing additional graduate student recruitment money; (c) increasing the amount of current stipends so that we can more effectively compete against peer institutions; (d) funding for additional students (see Objective 1; and Goals 1 and 3)

**Outcomes/Benchmarks.** A number of indices can be examined, such as (a) internally and externally funded assistantships, (b) assistantship salary, (c) grant submissions and awards by students, and (d) scholarly productivity of students (e.g., publications, presentations, awards).

### **3) IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE TRAINING IN PSYCHOLOGY OF DIVERSITY**

**Context.** We are a strong contributor to the core University value on “diversity of ideas and people” and help the College meet its goal to increase diversity. At the undergraduate level, we teach PSYC 330 (Psychology of Diversity; ACE Outcome 9 course), PSYC 425 (Psychology of Racism), and PSYC 310 (Psychology of Immigration). Psychology faculty have been regularly participating in the McNair Scholars program. At the graduate level, we added a Diversity Concentration. To aid recruitment of diverse graduate students, we annually write to the national list of McNair scholars interested in Psychology to encourage them to apply. Our Department’s Diversity Committee engages in a variety of efforts, including maintaining a web page and bulletin board with information and resources, and giving Diversity Enhancement Research awards for graduate and undergraduate students. We have gender diversity on assigned leadership positions: our Graduate Chair, an Associate Chair, and 2 of 5 graduate program coordinators are women.

**Actions and Resources Internally Allocated.** The brief list above clearly indicates we have invested significant internal resources to supporting the core value of diversity. We will further our efforts to improve undergraduate and graduate training in the psychology of diversity with the following efforts: (a) continue team-teaching as an overload a large-section of “Psychology of Diversity” course (PSYC 330) and its partnered graduate-level course; (b) further development of our Cultural Diversity Concentration; (c) continue offering psychology courses that contribute to other diversity programs (e.g., Psychology of Gender); (d) further discussions with other units on developing diversity-related collaborations and possible joint appointments; (e) continuing to promote/recognize diversity-related research through our Diversity Enhancement Research Awards; (f) follow best-practices for enhancing the diversity of applicant pools for faculty positions; (g) encourage further involvement in related interdisciplinary efforts such as the Minority Health Disparities.

**External Resources Needed.** The Department is clearly in need of increasing diversity of the faculty. Eight of 27 faculty members are women (29.6%) and three faculty members (11.1%) are ethnically diverse. Funding of additional faculty hiring requests will give us an opportunity to recruit and hire diverse individuals. Increasing the number and amount of graduate assistantship stipends would make us more competitive and aid in recruiting diverse students (see Goals 1 and 2). In addition, it would be helpful to have additional graduate recruitment money to assist with advertising and bringing students for campus visits.

**Outcomes/Benchmarks.** Some primary indicators include (a) courses addressing diversity; (b) involvement in the Diversity Concentration; and (c) recruitment/retention of diverse students and faculty.