Academic Program Review of the Department of Psychology, Georgia State University  
Site Visit Dates: February 29-March 1, 2016  
Site Visit Team:  
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Process  
Prior to the site visit, the site visitors reviewed the documents provided by the university (the academic program review (APR) self-study that was prepared by the department, led by the APR committee, along with the accompanying set of 30 appendices, as well as summary letters from the chair and dean), and other materials as relevant (e.g., the GSU Strategic Plan, the Department of Psychology website). During the course of the site visit, the site visitors received additional documents depicting the sources of graduate student funding for the past fiscal year; characteristics of undergraduate instructors; distribution of peer-reviewed publications by tenure-track faculty during 2014; and the results of the most recent faculty survey, which included a comparison of department faculty responses to university-wide responses.  

During the site visit, the team met with numerous constituent groups including the provost and others in the provost’s office; the dean and associate dean; department chair; pre-tenure faculty; post-tenure faculty; lecturers (non-tenure-track faculty); the APR committee chair and committee members; directors of undergraduate studies, graduate studies, each doctoral program, and the Language Research Center; undergraduate students; and graduate students.  

The site visit team met twice to prepare our comments for the exit interview. The report that follows lists the strengths of the psychology department, and relative weaknesses and issues that should be addressed.  

Strengths  
- Psychology has embraced the university’s strategic plan and aspirational goals.  
  - Faculty, for the most part, are responsive to University and College emphasis on high-level university goals for scholarship. For example, the department has modified promotion and tenure expectations to reflect expectations for excellence in both research and teaching; previously, excellence in one of these areas was required.  
- Overall, psychology is a very strong department as reflected in the following achievements, among others:  
  - The department has the highest number of peer-reviewed publications in university for every year of the APR period (2012-2014). The average number of publications is on par with and in some cases higher than similar institutions.  
  - Psychology has the 2nd-highest level of external grant support in the college, and 7th-highest in the university.
Psychology faculty lead several global and interdisciplinary initiatives including:

- International scholarship (Republic of South Africa, China, Korea, Israel)
- Language and Literacy initiative
- Brain & Behavior initiative
- Proposals that resulted in major successes in university initiatives (2CI)

Psychology faculty have major roles in university administration, including in the provost’s office and in two colleges (the college of arts and sciences and the honors college).

There is an extraordinary undergraduate program, which is notable in a number of aspects:

- The department serves a large number of students (approximately 1800 majors) at a very high level, with stellar lecturer and senior lecturer faculty who are committed to teaching excellence and to their students.
- Given the size of the undergraduate program, psychology generates a good deal of revenue for the university.
- There is substantial diversity among the undergraduate student population, e.g., 52% are African American.

- GSU is a minority-serving institution, and although it is not classified as an HBCU, the majority of its ethnic minority students are African American.
- A departmental point of pride and accomplishment is the fact that they award the greatest number of undergraduate degrees in psychology to African American students in the country.
- The department also serves a substantial number (about a third) of first generation college students.
- The sentiment of the students we met with indicated very positive training experiences and appreciation for faculty and their evident commitment to them.
- The department has several study abroad programs for its students and provides some financial support to assist these students in study abroad opportunities.

There is a strong graduate program with appropriate breadth and specialization. It is characterized by:

- A large number of graduate students
- A competitive applicant pool especially for the clinical program
- Excellent research opportunities
- A good deal of cross-training and collaboration through concentrations and research training
- The opportunity for post-masters PhD students to teach courses as instructors of record
- The graduate students feel supported, and that they are receiving a high-quality education
Issues to be addressed:

- The team identified several issues in the psychology department that should be addressed at the levels of the university and/or college:
  - Psychology has made increasing achievements (in external funding, in faculty peer-reviewed publications, in numbers of students served) in the face of decreasing resources. Psychology cannot sustain further growth without adequate resources. There are two major areas in which resource needs should be addressed:
    - College and/or university administration should back-fill the resources that have not been replaced, most importantly faculty lines. The university has benefitted substantially by psychology’s productivity, and should recognize the efforts and sacrifices that psychology has made by providing adequate resources. The university seems to have supported its interdisciplinary hiring initiatives by collecting lines that are vacated through faculty departures, including significant faculty departures in psychology (addressed separately below). Despite psychology’s successful participation in these interdisciplinary hiring initiatives, each interdisciplinary hire will devote less FTE to psychology per se, resulting in a net loss in FTE in psychology.
    - The amount of indirect cost return (ICR) to the department has been approximately halved to 26%. This new amount is relatively large compared to what departments receive in other universities. It is recommended that (1) the significant loss of ICR is validated as a change and explained through providing benchmark data from other universities; and that the following are explained clearly and transparently: (2) how ICR is used beyond the department; and (3) how ICR (other than the 26%) contributes to and/or is accessed by the department.
  - Faculty morale seemed to be at an historic low, due to several factors:
    - There have been many years of salary freezes, creating salary compression among existing faculty as new faculty are hired at higher salaries. It was encouraging to hear that there is a university-wide plan to address compression, beginning with full professors. It is recommended that the details of this process by shared with the faculty and that plans to extend this mechanism to associate-level faculty be laid out.
    - In addition, there is concern that some categories of high-performing faculty, such as the lecturer and senior lecturer faculty, who are responsible for the bulk of the undergraduate curriculum, may be particularly poorly paid, and their salaries should be reconsidered in comparison to GSU peer departments (like biology) and to other institutions, given their contributions to the university. Attention to avenues for promotion and contributions to and involvement in some university and college level activities they are currently excluded from should also be examined.
    - There are salary inequities created by the interdisciplinary hiring initiatives: faculty hired under these initiatives reportedly had significantly higher salaries than other faculty, by as much as a factor of two, in addition to more favorable support in other ways.
Morale also has been negatively affected by the change in ICR funding, as described above.

- Significant failures with basic infrastructure were described. These include:
  - Limited space, and poorly renovated space (e.g., old biology labs).
  - Issues with adequate information technology support, such as installing basic software and fixing printers.
  - Difficulties accomplishing basic purchasing (e.g., taking months to purchase a chair).
  - Faculty had highly variable experiences with both pre- and post-award grant support and administration due to high staff turn-over, variable quality of staff training, and lack of specialization and familiarity with processes and with faculty research.

- There is a notable dearth of faculty of color, especially for a minority-serving institution. The GSU strategic plan lacks a goal focused on advancing diversity. Reportedly, a separate Diversity Strategic Plan (DSP) exists, but several people did not seem to be aware of it. Those who were aware of the DSP were unaware if resources were associated with it, or if resource allocation decisions are based on it, which is the case with the university’s strategic plan. The available resources and the process to access them should be clarified. If the university wishes to recruit and retain faculty of color, it will need to recognize that such faculty are in high demand, and be prepared to offer competitive initial packages to them. It should also be recognized that faculty of color face unique challenges (e.g., more student and service requests) and efforts to address these challenges should be put in place. Cluster hiring initiatives could be considered to create a cohort of colleagues of color in order to enhance retention.

- Mentoring and faculty development mechanisms are lacking and/or absent.
  - There is a great need for a formal mentoring program for all faculty who have not yet attained the rank of Professor, particularly for pre-tenure tenure-track faculty. Out-of-department mentors could be included on each person’s mentoring committee, or separately from the mentoring committee, in order to have mentors who can provide advice about working effectively in the department and university, but who will not have the potential conflict of interest of voting on the mentees’ promotions.
  - Faculty could benefit from workshops and writing groups focused on professional development.
  - The university could consider institutional memberships that would extend mentoring resources to all faculty, such as the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity.

- In addition to the issues described above at the university and/or college levels, several additional issues for attention were noted at the department level.
  - There has been massive turnover of the faculty, which is of great concern. Since 2000-1, the department has hired 35 tenure-track faculty, and lost 34 tenure-track faculty; 12 new lecturers have been hired and 4 have left. This attrition has contributed to the low morale described above, and has meant that the department has been continually
searching for new colleagues, which represents significant investments of time and resources that could otherwise have been invested in elsewhere.

- Although the department has been very productive, it has not yet renowned, nor is there a plan to achieve this goal. The lack of a clear plan to raise its national standing is understandable, given that the department is overextended. As stated previously, psychology has embraced the university’s strategic plan and aspirational goals, and has the right values to achieve a good deal: they embrace psychology as a hub science, embrace the advancement of interdisciplinary work, and have high standards. The team identified some possible sources of misalignment in the department’s activities, which, if better aligned, could create synergies that would lead to true distinctiveness. These misalignments may include:
  - embracing interdisciplinary versus traditional, balkanized curriculum; and,
  - pursuing opportunities for active, applied learning through research activities versus learning through coursework.

The department may be allowing the “heavy” graduate curriculum to constrain their vision, activities, and likelihood of attaining a national reputation. For example, there is a tension between covering curricular needs and creating “space” for pursuing renown (i.e., scholarly “fame and glory”). The team encourages the department to consider identifying areas of misalignment, and their future goals. A retreat with the use of a professional facilitator may assist the department in tackling these important issues.

- The number of graduate students is substantial given the number of faculty. Increasing the number of graduate students should not be pursued without additional faculty. Another misalignment may exist here in the tension between advancing departmental renown and a large graduate program. Assuming the latter is the desired goal, decreasing the size of the graduate program should be considered. A ratio of 70% undergraduates to 30% graduate students was cited as goal for the institution in the meeting with the provost and her staff. The site visit team was unfamiliar with this ratio; the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education classifies doctoral universities as those “that awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctorates in 2013-14” (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php), which GSU meets easily.

- Support for graduate student recruitment was weak, with reports of faculty paying out of pocket for basic recruitment activities.

- There were two issues with the PhD program:
  - The department seeks to rename its concentration in the PhD program in Neuropsychology and Behavioral Neuroscience to Cognitive Neuroscience. The team was strongly supportive of this modification as being a common and contemporary name for its activities, in addition to appropriately reflecting the expertise and focus of that concentration.
  - Highly variable financial support and lack of transparency about funding is another issue. The stipends for some of the graduate students are low; in addition, they are variable – some students may earn over twice that of other students, depending, seemingly, on students’ advisors’ resources. In addition, students were concerned about the lack of predictability of funding amounts...
from year to year. Standardization of graduate student stipends is desirable in order to avoid creating castes and divisions among the students.

- The strategic plan’s globalization theme is addressed by the department, but the urbanization theme is not capitalized upon to the extent possible, given the position of the university in one of the U.S.’s prominent urban cities.

**Feedback Regarding Proposed Department Goals**

The letter from the dean and associate dean asked the site visit team to comment on the department’s goals.

**Goal 1** addresses the maintenance and enhancement of a top-tier faculty and proposes two new initiatives: (1) to re-engineer the department’s approach to investing in faculty scholarship and pedagogy; and (2) to create new, shared research space that extends beyond individual faculty labs.

- The review committee viewed this goal to be appropriate, but it needs of further refinement and specificity. What principles will guide the department’s decisions about further investments in scholarship and pedagogy? When considering investments in hiring to enhance scholarship, what types of hires will be prioritized? Hires that act as hubs? Or hires that bridge between sub-areas? Or hires that bring certain methodologies to the department? Or purely opportunistic hires that target the strongest candidates on the market in a given year irrespective of specific research area? It would seem advisable for the department to further consider its strengths and weaknesses in terms of research and training areas. Such information could feed into a set of principles and/or a department strategic plan.

**Goal 2** focuses on maintaining and enhancing the doctoral training program and proposes three initiatives: (1) increased efforts to recruit a diverse and competitive body of graduate students and maintain contact with them after graduation; (2) enhancing the training climate for students enrolled in the program; and (3) extending the breadth of post-baccalaureate training opportunities.

- The review committee viewed this goal as appropriate, but also in need of further refinement and specificity. The self-study lacked a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its various graduate programs. Where might the graduate program hold steady, expand, or contract? How will further investments be prioritized and staged? The review committee does not see capacity for growth of the graduate program; in fact, an increase in the ratio of faculty members compared to graduate students would be more consistent with what is seen in top-tier psychology departments.

**Goal 3** targets efforts to gain national recognition for the undergraduate program and proposes three initiatives: (1) develop a national summer undergraduate research experience; (2) enhance resources available to current undergraduate majors; and (3) create a faculty development program for the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).
Overall, the review committee was highly impressed with the quality of the undergraduate program. The department offered no rationale for developing a nationally recognized summer undergraduate research program, or how this program would differ from or extend the department’s current summer offerings. How does this goal dovetail with the department and university’s goal of raising the national ranking of the department along the dimensions contributing to a Carnegie Research I classification? In order to know how to best proceed one must ask, what is the value to the department and College in a nationally recognized UG summer research program?

Goal 4 addresses the university’s urban/cities and global strategic goals. These are the least fully developed in the GSU Strategic Plan and also the least developed in Goal 4.

- This goal appears to be important but is the least developed. It certainly seems reasonable to examine “each course with an eye to content areas where global and urban themes can be explored”, but that seems like only a first step. Among AAC&U’s high impact practices, GSU psychology undergraduates seem most engaged in research and global learning. Internships and service-learning activities are relatively undersubscribed, which could be an area for growth and development, with appropriate resources.

Finally, the site visit team wishes to extend our appreciation for the apparent care and effort that was invested in the review process, the preparation for the team’s visit, and the careful stewarding of the visit itself, particularly by Dr. Henrich, chair of psychology.