Annual Report of the Psychology Undergraduate Program  
2010-2011 

Karyn Plumm and Brett Holfeld

We intend with this report to describe the status of the Psychology Department Undergraduate Program and the activities associated with it during the 2010-2011 academic year. Karyn Plumm served as director of the program during this time. Brett Holfeld served as ½-time assistant during the year. In the narrative that follows we first describe our analysis of progress associated with the significant opportunities and challenges that were raised in last year’s report. This is followed by an account of this year’s major projects and a description of other activities. The report concludes with a presentation of activities either planned or contemplated for the year ahead and the identification of significant issues for the department.

Last Year’s Significant Issues

In last year’s annual report there were several issues identified that were thought to require substantial attention on the part of the department. Those issues are identified below along with actions undertaken to address them.

1. Establish essential studies approved courses/committee. The curriculum committee, along with instructors of ES courses, worked to complete provisional status requirements for courses needing revalidation. Additionally, the department voted to establish an Essential Studies Committee (of no less than 2 people) to consistently collect the data and information needed for continued approval of our courses as ES courses. This year the ES committee consisted of Drs. Bradley and Finstad.

   **Action.** The following courses have been established as ES courses:
   - Psyc 111 – with a goal of thinking and reasoning (primarily critical thinking)
   - Psyc 250 – with a goal of thinking and reasoning (primarily critical thinking)
   - Psyc 270 - with a goal of thinking and reasoning (primarily critical thinking)
   - Psyc 241 – with a goal of thinking and reasoning (primarily quantitative reasoning) and a special emphasis in quantitative reasoning (Q)
   - Psyc 405 – with goals of communication and information literacy. Psyc 405 was approved as a capstone course.
   - Psyc 421 – with a goal of diversity and a special emphasis in global diversity (G)
   - Psyc 433 – with a goal of communication and a special emphasis in advanced communication (A)

   Additionally, we may seek approval for another course with an “A” emphasis (e.g., Psyc 460) as such courses offered in other departments are difficult for our majors to complete (i.e., they have many prerequisites).

2. Maintenance and growth of online program. The undergraduate online program continues to grow in its second year. Although issues of 1) advising and 2) student tracking have continued to be particularly difficult, the department voted to develop all of our courses for online so they can be offered more regularly. The largest obstacle our students in this program...
face is 3) the ability to take courses required outside of the department. Specifically, our biology requirement has caused some students to transfer elsewhere.

**Actions.** 1) The Curriculum Committee is working to put together an academic “plan” for online students. As this project began, the biggest issue was students transferring credits. A large proportion of the distance students are transferring courses from one or more other institutions. It is difficult as an advisor to give recommendations to students when most of the transfer process is completed either at the Registrar’s Office or at Arts & Sciences. This project will be ongoing.

2) During focus groups, students are asked additional questions regarding online courses and whether they would identify as distance students or not. Students taking Psyc 405 online also partake in the focus groups. We are beginning to get a better idea of what our online program is made up of. Approximately 3% of the 68 students who answered questions about online courses identified as “distance” students and 32% had taken at least one online course. This is the first year we were able to poll students for focus groups in Psyc 405 online. It is quite likely that the students who identify as “distance” learners will grow exponentially in the next couple of years as we continue to ask such questions.

3) The department voted to alter the requirements for biology to better match the Essential Studies requirements. This vote included approval to establish a new course (Psyc 330) entitled “Biological Bases of Behavior.” This course would be offered online. The new requirements would be that students need to complete the 4-credit lab science required by ES and in addition must also complete one of the following: Bio 111, Bio 150, Bio 151, Anat 204, or Psyc 330. Dr. Plumm completed the required application materials for the college and the attempt was stalled by Biology Department rejection. The College Curriculum Committee tabled the request until the upcoming academic year. The issue will be raised again.

**Major Projects**

1. **Continue to assess the undergraduate program**

   The data that are reported here relate both to the official plan and other assessment information. There are essentially four types of assessment data: (1) data from focus groups held with students in History and Systems classes; (2) scores from the ACAT exam given to all psychology majors in the History and Systems class, (3) evaluation of the writing of a sample of students from lab-based courses, and (4) data from student transcripts. Reported below are, first, a description of the results associated with the four types of data and, second, a summary of the findings associated with the assessment plan.

   **Focus Groups**

   The main purpose of the focus groups is to gain feedback directly from seniors about their experiences as psychology majors. Students are asked about strengths of the program, concerns about the program, and future career plans. Opportunities for anonymous written feedback, in addition to the oral feedback, are also given. This was the ninth year that the focus groups were held in conjunction with the History and Systems class which is restricted to seniors
only. Thanks to Mariah Laver, Kevin Montes, Eevett Loshek, Joe Neal, and Karey O’Hare Brewster, who helped conduct the focus groups.

Some of the major findings include:
The major strengths of the program that the students perceived were:

- Opportunity to be involved in outside-of-the-classroom experiences (i.e., research and practical experiences)
- Faculty advising
- Faculty and graduate assistant teaching
- Offering of online courses (convenience of scheduling)
- Student Psychological Association
- SONA system for research
- Support staff (Pam and Lauri have been very helpful!)
- Many faculty were mentioned specifically as having a positive impact on student experiences in areas of teaching and advising

The first strength has consistently been mentioned over several years as a strong point of the program. It is gratifying to see the Orientation to the Major course was mentioned as a strength in advising. It was also mentioned that some faculty are willing to advise students who are not their “official” advisees which is viewed positively. Three strengths mentioned this year—SPA, SONA, and support staff—were not identified last year. Two strengths mentioned last year – special topics courses, variety of courses – were not mentioned this year.

Students identified the following concerns:

- Advising. Although many students’ experiences were reported as positive, others had concerns with advising. Specifically, some faculty were not knowledgeable enough, some faculty seemed to dislike advising students, students reported feeling disrespected and unimportant in their interactions with faculty, and students expressed concern for advising toward the clinical degree and nothing else (i.e., other graduate degrees or job placement at the bachelor level).

- Teaching. Again, although many students expressed positive impressions of teaching, others had concerns. Specifically, students reported that some professors do not seem as interested in their teaching as they do about their research (insincere), boring, monotonous lectures in many psychology classes, many labs seem pointless and do not add to student’s learning experience, some professors are very difficult to deal with (e.g., designing test questions in a way to trick students rather than assess learning), feeling as if some professors wanted them to fail, some professors are unprofessional in class when discussing their social life, some teaching assistants were also unprofessional and unknowledgeable about their course, and a lack of consistency between TA’s and professors (e.g., grading papers and open-ended assignments)

- Courses. Students expressed a desire for more elective classes to cover many different areas of psychology. They also reported a lot of redundancy between many psychology classes, an interest in having more discussion based courses, a need for a course on APA formatting, a desire to have smaller class sizes, a desire to have a psychology-based biology course (i.e., biology courses taken in the biology department are viewed as “not helpful or pertinent to understanding aspects of psychology”), and the desire to have a “practical experiences” course. Other courses indicated as wanting to see made available more often are: Child Clinical Psychology and Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation.
SPSS. Many students feel inadequately prepared to use SPSS software. They reported a desire to have multiple statistics courses throughout the psychology major.

The state of Corwin-Larimore Hall. Some students believe that our building is inadequate for the needs of the department and is in a state of disrepair. Specifically mentioned as poor rooms were 103 and 108. Students are also concerned about the lack of computers available and printing capabilities in the computer lab. It was suggested that a swipe-card accessible printer be made available (similar to other on-campus computer labs).

The concerns about variety of courses, SPSS, and the building appeared last year. Students were much more diverse in their concerns about courses and/or teaching this year. Some of these have been identified and the department is working to resolve them (e.g., biology). The concern about SPSS and understanding of statistics is one the department has identified as well. The Curriculum Committee is currently working to resolve some of these issues through a possible change to required courses for undergraduate psychology majors aimed at improving statistical skill and knowledge as well as scientific writing ability.

One of the aspects reported directly this year was the notion that many students meet with faculty other than their assigned advisors. They reported that negative experiences with their advisors keep them from wanting to meet with them and they also reported being grateful for those faculty that are willing to meet with students who are not their assigned advisees. This has been an intermittent problem identified by the department previously. There has been an attempt to address this issue previously in the advisor evaluation forms however the same problems are continuously reported. This will need to be addressed in an alternate way.

We asked students to report short-term and long-term career plans. We categorized their responses and organized them into the following table. A consistent finding over several years of collecting this type of data is that 2/3 to 3/4 of the students have plans that include graduate or professional school. That pattern was repeated this year again. Many students reported working with their bachelor degree initially to begin paying off student loans before continuing on to graduate school.

Percent of Students Indicating Different Categories of Short- and Long-Term Plans (Last Three Year’s Values are in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Response</th>
<th>Short-Term</th>
<th>Long-Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional School (Career) in Psychology</td>
<td>16 (41, 9, 13)</td>
<td>24 (23, 38,40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional School (Career) in Non-Psychology Discipline</td>
<td>19 (30, 42, 19)</td>
<td>22 (30, 23,26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional School (Career) Undecided</td>
<td>3 (0, 14, 20)</td>
<td>6 (9, 12, 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue Undergraduate Education</td>
<td>1 (0, 3, 10)</td>
<td>0 (0,0, 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment with Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>18 (28, 13, 18)</td>
<td>4 (0, 0, 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Undecided</td>
<td>0 (9, 20,0)</td>
<td>1 (13, 21,34)</td>
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ACAT Exam

The second assessment component was the Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT), which the department administered for the first time during the spring 2004 semester.
The exam was given to students in the History and Systems class and funded by fees that students paid when they enrolled in the course. There are 12 subtests offered by PACAT (the company that administers the exam) but only 10 can be tested per year and scores are normed compared to other undergraduate students nationwide. A total of 71 students completed the ACAT exam this year. The following table summarizes student performance.

**ACAT Performance by Sub-Area (Last Year’s Values in Parentheses)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>51 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal</td>
<td>53 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Learning &amp; Motivation</td>
<td>51 (NT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical/Counseling</td>
<td>50 (NT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>51 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Design</td>
<td>61 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History &amp; Systems</td>
<td>48 (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Learning/Cognition</td>
<td>NT (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>47 (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>57 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensation &amp; Perception</td>
<td>NT (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>44 (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>47 (50)</td>
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</tbody>
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*NT = not tested this year

**Writing Assessment**

Under the department’s writing assessment plan, the ability of our advanced students to write empirical research papers is assessed. A sample of papers from laboratory-based and other 400-level courses where complete APA-format empirical research papers are assigned is assessed annually by members of the Curriculum Committee. A total of ten papers are typically assessed, each by at least two committee members, using a rubric established by the committee when the process was developed five years ago. The entire committee discusses the results and prepares a report for the department, describing the major strengths and weaknesses. The results of the assessment employing this process were once again reported to the department. Using as a standard what the committee expected of advanced undergraduate writing, 2 of the 10 papers was judged to be A-level, 4 were B-level, 2 were C-level, 1 was D-level, and 1 was judged as failing. This is somewhat poorer than the prior year’s findings overall and there were clearly poorer writing mechanics throughout the papers (i.e., grammar, sentence structure). There was also still a major lack of integration in the papers.

The **strengths** that were identified were:

- proper use of APA format
- good writing mechanics in introduction sections but lacking in integration

The major **weaknesses** were:

- literature review not synthesized or analyzed
- lack of organization of thought
- poor understanding of statistics and/or results
- lack of discussion or integration of discussion
- limitations of the research either not discussed or discussed too extensively
- lack of description of importance or relevance of the findings
- writing style unprofessional

**Assessment Plan**

Seven student learning goals constitute the official assessment plan of the undergraduate program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Goals &amp; Objectives</th>
<th>Assessment Methods</th>
<th>Assessment Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will know the origins of the field of psychology and its major schools of thought</td>
<td>Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT), History and Systems subtest—50% of majors achieve a percentile rank of 50% or higher; improvement over successive years</td>
<td>2007—47.4% 2008—30.0% 2009 – 37.2% 2010 – 43.2% 2011 – 47.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Thinking and Reasoning (critical, creative, and quantitative): Students will understand the essentials of psychological research, how psychological phenomena are investigated and analyzed</td>
<td>ACAT, Experimental Design and Statistics subtests—50% of majors achieve a percentile rank of 50% or higher; improvement over successive years</td>
<td>Exp. Design 2007—68.4% 2008—59.0% 2009 – 60.3% 2010 – 65.4% 2011 – 63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students will develop a broad background in the field of psychology</td>
<td>ACAT, overall score—50% of majors achieve a percentile rank of 50% or higher; improvement over successive years</td>
<td>2007—61.8% 2008–44.0% 2009 – 42.3% 2010 – 54.3% 2011 – 52.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication and Information Literacy: Students will learn how to write empirical research papers on a psychological topic.</td>
<td>Psychology Department writing assessment instrument—75% of majors sampled achieve a rating of “average” or “above average,” where any paper judged below a B-level was considered “below average.” Improvement over time. This</td>
<td>2007—80% of papers judged to be “average” or “above average” 2008—50% of papers judged to be “average” or “above average.” 2009 – 80% of papers judged to be “average” or “above average”</td>
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is the second year of use of this process.

2010 – 80% of papers judged to be “average” or “above average”

2011 – 60% of papers judged to be “average” or “above average”

5. Students will experience a department (faculty, staff, facilities) that supports and encourages their learning and their career goals.

Focus groups of students in the Psyc 405 class—feedback themes that indicate general satisfaction with experiences as a psychology student.

There is a mixture of satisfaction and concern that is difficult to summarize in a few sentences. We continue to look at ways to address the major concerns that students describe.

6. Service/Citizenship
Students will engage in experiential learning

Number of psychology graduates who have enrolled in Psy 395 or Psy 397—percent increases annually with an eventual goal of 25%

2007—8.51%
2008—13.89%
2009 – 10.20%
2010 – 11.3%
2011 – 0.05%

7. Diversity

Number of graduates who have completed a psychology course designated as either “U” or “G” by essential studies criteria with an eventual goal of 75%

2011 – 18.9%

In regard to goals 1-3, generally speaking, performance on the ACAT was much better than it was the year before, such that two of the goals involving the ACAT (2 experimental design and 3 overall score) was met, with improvement in the numbers of students performing at the 50th percentile or better on the other goals. We are still not meeting the goals set for all of the aspects of the ACAT exam. There are a couple of possible reasons for the poor performance:

1. Our students are not learning at the level we desire.
2. The students did not have incentive to do well on the exam.

There are probably several other possible explanations as well. Given that many of our students go on to graduate and other professional programs, the first explanation is likely not the case. Students are able to learn at the level we desire, however many of our students may not be doing this. The majors in psychology are majors for reasons other than wanting to pursue careers in psychology. For example, we have many majors who intended to go into Nursing, Physical Therapy or Occupational Therapy and chose to be psychology majors only after they did not get into such programs. They may not have the incentive to do as well in the discipline as those who chose it in the first place. Even though students may have incentive to do well in courses, the incentive to do well on the exam may still be lacking. Psyc 405 faculty have begun to provide a points incentive for students to take the exam as well as for them to do well on the exam. All of these may have been somewhat effective in that we did see improvement from previous year’s results.

Student writing for goal 4 was somewhat poorer that the previous year and falls below the goal set for this aspect of assessment. There have been concerns about the basic writing mechanics ability of students that they should have learned by virtue of the Engl 110, 120/125 sequence that is required of all
UND students. The department has previously discussed the notion of adding a writing course to the curriculum but given our limited budget and course allotment, has been unable to do so. We will continue to teach writing mechanics in the appropriate courses.

Our assessment of the fifth goal with focus group data has revealed a consistent pattern over several years with research assistant opportunities as a consistent perceived strength. It is heartening to see apparent effects of our efforts to improve advising, as students valued the Psyc 120 course and faculty advising. Students have once again however, mentioned advising by some faculty as a negative experience in the department. Although the perception of advising is changing for some students, others continue to have poor experiences. It is our goal to see these experiences continue to improve through the use of Psyc 120, drop-in advising, and helpful advising tools such as the My Psychology Advisor Blackboard Organization.

Results relating to the sixth goal are a little discouraging. Perhaps our efforts to promote experiential learning have waned. We have dropped for the second year in a row, the number of students engaging in experiential learning. It is interesting to contrast participation in experiential learning with participation as a research assistant. Almost 72% of graduating seniors had earned credits as a research assistant. That experience is a great opportunity for students to experience research first-hand and it has become a part of the culture of the department for undergraduate students to participate in that way. We hope that experiential learning will move in the same direction. Levels of enrollment in Psyc 395 have been increasing over the past few semesters as more opportunities become available to students. It is likely we will see a change in the percentage of students partaking in practical experiences in the years to come.

Goal 7 is a newly added goal that we have just begun to collect data for this year. At present, we currently have almost 20% of graduate completing a psychology course identified as either “G” or “U” for special emphasis in diversity. We will continue to monitor this and make changes to this goal if necessary.

2. Continue to improve student advising.

Drop-In Advising

Judging from the focus group data as well as from informal feedback, many students continue to value the drop-in advising program that is held for about a month during the pre-registration period. We appreciate the support of the faculty who volunteered their time to staff the drop-in advising periods. Thanks to Drs. Finstad, Grabe, Ruthig, Wise, Derenne, King, and Peters, as well as to Brett Holfeld for their time this year. In past years, we’ve had about 40 – 60 students participate. This year we had 26 students partake in drop-in advising (13 in Fall and 13 in Spring). This significant drop in students using the drop-in advising may be due to the greater satisfaction with advising in general. We plan to make some slight changes to drop-in advising so that faculty will have access to online resources when speaking with students. This will make the process easier and more informative for students as well as allow faculty to remain in their office while advising students.

Advising Efforts

Since the implementation of the Psyc 120 course, we have had much more positive
feedback about advising. We have completed the “My Psychology Advisor” Blackboard site which has served to replace the previous listserve of students and to provide one place for students to be able to view advising checklists and find out how to best contact their advisor. The site also serves to announce practical experience opportunities for students, applications and deadlines for things such as awards, emphases, and information sessions. We also engaged in several other activities, in which the primary intent was to improve the quality of advising, including:

- Meeting with prospective students (either during visits to the department or the campus-wide open house events), prospective majors, minors (declared and prospective), and majors with questions about the program. The Director of the Undergraduate Program meets with dozens of students (in addition to his or her advisees) over the course of the year with various types of questions. Some of the meetings are simply phone calls, some are e-mail contacts, and many are face-to-face meetings. Enrollment services had over 50 schedule meetings with Karyn throughout the year. During the Fall Open House Karyn met with 42 students and their families. During the Spring Open House, she met with 20. Many other faculty in the department have similar types of contacts with students and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

- Serving as the contact person for transfer students who wish to have transfer psychology courses count toward the psychology major at UND. Sometimes to answer their questions the student is required to submit course syllabi and the Director of the Undergraduate Program asks the relevant Psychology Department instructor to examine the syllabus for its comparability to the corresponding UND course. We appreciate the faculty’s cooperation in helping with this process.

3. Assist first-year teaching assistants.

Several years ago the department approved a program of working with first-year teaching assistants with the goal of enhancing the experiences of students in the labs of large-enrollment classes and of the teaching assistants leading those labs. First year TAs (graduate and undergraduate) attended bi-weekly one-hour meetings for seven sessions during the fall semester, six at the beginning and one near the end. A major component of each of our weekly meetings was discussion of teaching-related issues that had arisen during the prior week. In addition, specific teaching-related topics were discussed, including Meeting a Class for the First Time, Leading a Discussion and Using Videos and Technology Effectively, Delivering an Effective Lecture, Ethics in Teaching, Dealing with Problem Behaviors, Dealing with Technology Breakdown, Online Course Instruction, and Dealing with Cheating. Near the end of the semester we discussed how to deal with end-of-semester issues. Undergraduate students received 1 credit of Psychology 492: Independent Projects for their participation (they also had additional expectations, including writing summaries of their experiences of being a TA as well as what they were learning in the seminar and observing other TAs in their teaching). During the spring semester, one undergraduate teaching assistant met with Karyn to discuss teaching issues.

4. Manage the undergraduate student awards program.

This was the eighth year of our student awards process. Each fall three awards are made
at the time of Psi Chi initiation—Outstanding Undergraduate Research, Outstanding Undergraduate Service and Outstanding Psychology Student. In October we solicited both student applications and faculty nominations, and three-person faculty committees conducted blind reviews of the materials. As a result of that process, Brianne Huber received the award for Outstanding Undergraduate Service, Mark Hoffarth was honored for Outstanding Undergraduate Research, and Shea Thomas was selected the Outstanding Psychology Student. There were fewer applicants for all awards this year than in previous years. We will strive to get the information out to students more effectively about the awards process. We wish to thank Drs. Weatherly, Peters, and Kehn for their assistance in conducting the reviews.

Other Activities

There were several other activities in which we engaged during the year, including:

- Coordinated the cooperative education program. There were 0 students who participated this year.
- Monitored the undergraduate emphasis system, with 14 students earning emphases with their fall or spring graduations. This total compares with 9 students last year and 17 the year before. To date (since the Fall 2000 Semester up through this summer), 209 students have received emphasis documentation, 3 in five areas, 10 in four areas, 26 in three areas, 72 in two areas, and 98 in one area. One hundred fifty-four emphases have been earned in Clinical Science, 73 in the Psychology of Human Development, 52 in Psychology of Education and Learning, 54 in Social and Cultural Psychology, and 41 in Biological and Physiological Psychology.
- Maintained the undergraduate bulletin board.
- Maintained and updated the faculty/staff/GTA picture bulletin board.
- Took pictures of students presenting their honor’s thesis at the Undergraduate Honors Thesis Conference in spring of 2011. These pictures were then posted on the Undergraduate Web Page (with permission).
- Maintained an undergraduate publication board. Photocopies of the title pages of articles with undergraduate student authors are posted on a bulletin board near the main psychology office. This is updated on an ongoing basis.

Future Projects

We have the following responsibilities that we believe to be ongoing:

- Maintain an advising site through Blackboard for undergraduate students
- Maintain the undergraduate web page
- Coordinate drop-in advising
- Conduct focus groups with History and Systems students
- Work with the History and Systems instructors to administer the ACAT exam
- Monitor assessment data according to the department’s undergraduate assessment plan and report to the department
- Meet with prospective psychology majors
- Monitor the undergraduate emphasis system
- Maintain the undergraduate bulletin board (changed once a semester)
- Maintain the undergraduate publication bulletin board (ongoing)
- Maintain the faculty/staff/GTA picture board (changed once a year)
- Coordinate the cooperative education course credits
- Coordinate the practical experiences course credits
- Coordinate the student awards
- Lead the teaching enhancement training of first-year GTAs and undergraduate teaching assistants
- Conduct special informational sessions for psychology majors (replacing the cohort advising process)
- Review proposed course schedule to try to minimize time overlap of courses likely taken by the same students.