

**Department**  
**Of**  
**Psychology**

**George Washington  
University**

**Strategic Plan**

**3/26/03**

## **Introduction**

The Department of Psychology at the George Washington University is in transition. The departure, through retirement or other circumstances, of six tenure-track professors over the last four years provides the department with an opportunity to reflect on its goals. Likewise, Dean Frawley's recent proposal to merge the Industrial-Organizational Psychology Ph.D. program with the Organizational Sciences program prompts consideration of the relations between the remaining Ph.D. programs, (Applied Social Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Cognitive Neuropsychology) within the broader department.

In the context of these developments, the department initiated a planning process in the academic year 2002-2003. The purpose of this process was to revise and amend our prior strategic plan. Our emphasis was on identifying a small number of department goals and delineating the concrete steps necessary to achieve these goals. The succeeding sections present the two goals we identified and describe our proposals for achieving them.

### **Goal 1: Enhance the Department's National Reputation and Research Prominence**

The faculty strongly endorses the goal of enhancing the department's national reputation and research prominence. This goal reflects the University and College's aspirations, as well as the personal goals of our faculty. It represents our belief that the creation of knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge are core components of our mission. We propose two initiatives to help accomplish this goal.

#### **Initiative 1.1: Integrate the foci of departmental Ph.D. programs and hiring proposals with the department's strategic themes.**

Consistent with the general orientation of the University and College, the department recognizes that strategic themes foster our attempts to enhance our national reputation. Thematic foci help define an identity for the department and create synergies that arise from the sharing of resources among faculty.

In our previous strategic plan we endorsed two strategic themes: health and diversity. Here we emphasize our continuing commitment to these themes, with a special focus on work at the intersection of health and diversity.

Regarding our focus on health, we propose a Departmental theme of *Psychological Bases of Health and Illness*. This theme emphasizes that our interests lie in the psychological processes supporting the development of mental and physical health. Consistent with this theme, each of our graduate Ph.D. programs has designated a related theme. These themes are:

Clinical Psychology: Prevention and Health Promotion in Urban Communities;  
Cognitive Neuropsychology: Cognitive Processes and Brain Disorders; and  
Applied Social Psychology: Psychosocial Determinants of Health.

Our focus on *Psychological Bases of Health and Illness* arose as a natural representation of faculty research interests, reflecting issues of significant societal concern. Despite remarkable technological advances, our society still faces staggering threats to its physical and mental health. These problems include

widespread substance use, emotional and cognitive disorders, infectious diseases and economic disparities. In the United States, over 1 of a million people have contracted AIDS (USDHHS, 2000), almost 15 million people currently use illicit drugs (NIDA, 1999), and over 44 million adults suffer from one or more mental disorders (NIMH, 2001). Along these same lines the Global Burden of Disease study, conducted by the World Health Organization, identified mental disorders as five of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide. Last, although these problems affect people throughout the United States and the world, they are particularly prevalent in metropolitan urban areas such as Washington, DC.

The Psychology Department at the George Washington University has begun to address many of these issues through its research, teaching and community service, and now proposes to coordinate and strengthen these efforts. Moreover, the substantial recent increases in the National Institute of Health's budget suggest excellent prospects for external funding in these areas.

Our focus on *Psychological Bases of Health and Illness* has already borne results in numerous ways. Among our recent projects, Drs. Zea and Poppen received an R01 extramural award to study disclosure of HIV status among Latino gay men, Dr. Sigelman received a NIDA grant entitled "Theory-Centered Approach to Teaching Children about Drugs," Dr. Ganiban received a Minority Supplement Grant from NIMH for a study on "Facilitating the Internal Regulation of Feeding", Dr. Dopkins received an NIMH grant to basic processes of memory, Dr. Howe and Dr. Rohrbeck received an NIMH-funded award to study Child and family adaptation following parental job loss, Dr. Le received an R21 award from NIMH for a project entitled *Mamás Y Bebés: Prevention Intervention Development*, and Dr. Philbeck's received an NSF grant to study "MRI: Research Infrastructure for Distributed Sensor Applications in the Home of the Future."

Our focus on *Psychological Bases of Health and Illness* has also been extremely helpful to the department in integrating our hiring. In the context of this theme we have recently hired faculty in the important areas of maternal depression, adolescent parenting, and women's health.

Our focus on *Diversity* represents a commitment to recruiting a diverse faculty and student body. Our commitment extends broadly, encompassing the domains of gender, race/ethnicity, age, health status, and sexual orientation, among others. Our focus on *Diversity* also reflects the research of numerous faculty members who study under-represented groups. While our commitment to diversity reflects core values of the faculty, we also view it as a strategic decision because our location in Washington, DC provides us with significant advantages over many peer institutions in recruiting students and faculty from diverse backgrounds. The metropolitan area also provides us with access to participant populations that are not available in other locales.

Our theme of *Diversity* creates important synergies with our theme of *Psychological Bases of Health and Illness*. Much recent research has emphasized that health promotion and disease prevention initiatives must consider health disparities that occur across age, gender, ethnicity and race, income and education, disability, geographic location, and sexual orientation. NIH defines health disparities as including differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality and burden of

disease that exist among specific population groups in the United States, with an immediate emphasis on racial/ethnic minority populations, and groups of low socioeconomic status. Indeed, addressing global and national health disparities is one of the two primary goals of Healthy People 2010, the document that sets out health goals and objectives for the U.S. over the next decade (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Similarly, NIH has required each of its institutes to develop strategic plans for addressing health disparities and it has recently invited social scientists to conduct research on health disparities and to develop new treatment and prevention approaches to overcome them (NIH, 2001).

In this context, our strategic theme of diversity has recently borne fruit in three concrete ways. First, in the past five years, our Ph.D. students have competed for and received four minority fellowships from the American Psychological Association. Three students are currently being reviewed. Within this five-year period, five ethnic minority students and one student with a disability applied for and received competitive NIH National Research Services Awards (F31) and two are currently under review. These awards are available for minority and non-minority students and are extremely competitive. [Two students have also won dissertation awards from the District of Columbia Psychological Association; these awards are given for research with diverse populations.](#)

Second, we have received significant grant funding for studies involving health disparities across various groups. As mentioned above, Drs. Zea and Poppen have received an R01 extramural award to study disclosure of HIV status among Latino gay men. Together with Dr. Wong, from Public Health, Drs. Zea and Poppen received another award to examine sexuality, drug use and HIV risk among male Asian/Pacific Islanders. Dr. Zea also has a subcontract from Arizona State University for a T32 Training Grant funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse to train researchers in ethnographic research in ethnic minority communities. Dr. Molock received a K award to further her research examining risk factors for suicide among African American adolescents. In addition, a number of faculty have recently submitted proposals which are awaiting review: Dr. Le, to study post-partum depression among Latina women; Drs. Zea and Poppen to study contextual factors of sexual risk among Latino men; Dr. Echeverry, a Research Assistant Professor, to study club drug use among this same population. Finally, Dr. Zea is a co-investigator in two other proposals under review: one of sexual risk among the new Latino immigrants and another one on alcohol and drug use/abuse among African Americans, Vietnamese, and Salvadorans.

Third, a number of our recent graduates have taken academic or research positions at institutions such as Penn State University, University of Miami, University of Colorado, University of Maryland, University of Southern California, Fordham University, Western Oregon University, Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, Gallaudet University, National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Health and Human Development, and the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

Here we propose a slate of six prospective hires designed to enhance the preceding themes. The hiring proposals from each Ph.D. program were presented to a joint meeting of the Executive and Graduate Studies Committees. All proposals were reviewed and a prioritized list of future hires was constructed and presented to the faculty for discussion and approval. The slate was unanimously approved by the Department's faculty. While it is anticipated that most of the hires will be at the beginning assistant professor level, graduate specialty areas may also wish to request positions at the advanced assistant or associate professor levels depending on a variety of considerations

The proposed slates of hires as described by research and teaching specialization (in priority order, with associated graduate program in parentheses) is:

1. Prevention of Health Problems and/or Psychological Disorders among Child or Adolescent Urban/Diverse populations (Clinical Psychology)
2. Biological Bases of Human Memory, Cognition and Cognitive Disorders (Cognitive Neuropsychology)
3. The Effects of Social influence, Social Support and Persuasion Processes on Mental and Physical Health (Applied Social Psychology)
4. Prevention of Health Problems and/or Psychological Disorders among Adult Urban/Diverse populations (Clinical Psychology)
5. Biologically-plausible Computational Models of Memory, Cognition and Cognitive Disorders (Cognitive Neuropsychology)
6. Medical Decision Making (Applied Social Psychology)

More detailed descriptions of each position are presented, grouped by graduate program, in Appendix A. We believe that the focused nature of the preceding hires, combined with the continued growth and maturity of our current faculty's research will lead to substantial increases in our national reputation and research prominence.

Initiative 1.2: Enhance Funding for Graduate Students by re-allocating funds to create multi-year packages and increasing external funding.

Research and graduate training in psychology is conducted using an apprenticeship model. Faculty members work jointly with graduate students to conceptualize, conduct and publish research. Given this model, the recruitment of talented graduate students is essential to enhancing our national reputation and research prominence. The extreme competition for top students motivates us to increase the financial support we provide to students. Here we propose two approaches to accomplish this objective.

First, we will attempt to use our available resources more effectively by providing students with multi-year guaranteed funding. To facilitate recruiting of top students, faculty members who hold research grants can petition their Ph.D. program and the Department to create multi-year packages for students. These packages can consist of: (1) Two years of a research assistant position combined with two years of a teaching assistant position; or (2) three years of a research assistant position combined with one year of a teaching/research fellow position. (The teaching/research fellow position must be held in the student's fourth year.) In

the former case the department will attempt to provide 9 tuition credits for the student for every year they serve as a research assistant. This will supplement the 9 credits that are provided through University employee-tuition benefits. For the latter case, the Department will attempt to provide this same support when the student is a research assistant. During the research/teaching fellow year, the student will be asked to teach three courses, (one in Fall, Spring and Summer), and the department will provide a \$14,000 stipend, consisting of \$9,000 for teaching the three courses and \$5,000 from the Johnson Bequest Funds. In addition to the provisions just outlined, the teaching/research fellowship may also be awarded to exceptional fourth-year graduate students to facilitate degree completion.

Second, we must increase the number of available research assistantships by increasing faculty grant funding. To facilitate the procurement of funding, the department will provide funds to facilitate the collection of pilot data for grant applications. Our initial efforts in this regard appear promising as funds allocated to Dr. Molock this fall have produced pilot data that will form the basis of a RO1 proposal to be submitted shortly. Other specific steps the Department will take to facilitate grant activity include providing release time for investigators who have received positive initial reviews and providing clerical support for grant preparation (including budget preparation assistance). Further, the department may also hire outside consultants to hold symposia on grant funding and, if requested, provide consultation to individual faculty. The department will support these activities using the Johnson Bequest Funds.

We believe these measures will enhance our ability to recruit top graduate students. Collaborative efforts between our faculty and these students will, in turn, enhance our department's research productivity, with consequent effects on our national reputation and research prominence.

#### Goal 1: Measurable Outcomes

Reputational measures are notoriously slow to change. To provide proximal measures of whether we are enhancing our national reputation and research prominence, we will examine the following measures with a goal of increases of 50% over three years.

1. Number of Publications
2. Number of Grant Proposals Submitted
3. Total Grant Expenditures
4. Average Impact Factor of Publication Journals

#### **Goal Two: Enhance the Quality of the Undergraduate Psychology Major**

Over the last three years, substantial increases in the University's and College's enrollments have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of Psychology majors. As of last spring, there were approximately 550 psychology majors. This influx of majors has strained our resources and challenged our ability to provide a high quality experience for our majors.

We strongly endorse the University and College's goal of enhancing the academic experience for undergraduates. Moreover, we see the achievement of this goal as essential to the University's aspirations, as well as its long-term enrollments and fiscal health. As such, we propose four initiatives designed to enhance the quality of the undergraduate psychology major.

### Initiative 2.1: Revise Departmental Advising and Major Declaration Procedures

The recent increase in majors has overburdened our advising system. To address this issue, we have instituted two revisions on a pilot basis this year. First, rather than providing a single type of pre-registration advising, we have provided two types of pre-registration advising. Students who simply require a review of their proposed programs of study can drop off materials for an overnight review by a faculty advisor. If the program of study is deemed appropriate, students can pick up their approved documents the next day. Students who would like a more extensive consultation can drop in on any of our pre-registration advisors during the office hours that are posted in the department's lobby. This more extensive advising is also given to students whose program of study is deemed to be inappropriate in the overnight registration process. This two-level advising system allows us to make more effective use of our limited resources, while targeting the appropriate level of advising to individual students.

Second, we have expanded our major declaration procedures. This expansion includes the provision of additional information to students and the creation of a team of major declaration advisors. As with the pre-registration advisors, students can go to any of the ten major declaration advisors whose office hours are posted prominently. By putting additional resources into major declaration advising, we are attempting to help students map out a coherent academic program and a plausible career plan. The changes outlined here have been implemented in academic year 2002-2003, with favorable initial responses from students. We will review and revise our procedures further in academic year 2003-2004.

### Initiative 2.2: Undertake a revision of the Undergraduate Psychology Curriculum in Academic Year 2003-2004

The on-going transition in our faculty provides an opportunity to consider our curriculum and its relation to recent pedagogical and substantive trends in our field. The following five items, among others, have been suggested for review by our faculty:

1. The addition of 100 level courses to reflect the research interests of new faculty
2. Determination of whether the department should have a capstone course requirement in addition to, or in lieu of, Psychology 196, (History and Systems).
3. Consideration of whether there is sufficient enrollment demand, and faculty resources, for a B.S. degree
4. Review of the undergraduate research experience with special attention to Psychology 191, (Independent Research), and the possibility of instituting an undergraduate research conference
5. Examination of whether we can use our graduate teaching assistants in alternative, more effective, ways.

### Initiative 2.3: Institute the Requirement of a C+ in Introductory Psychology for Major Declaration.

The extreme heterogeneity of students' aptitude and knowledge poses significant pedagogical challenges in psychology. To ensure a reasonable shared knowledge base for students enrolling as psychology majors, we will require a grade

of C+ or better in Introductory Psychology, (or its advanced placement equivalent), for major declaration. This requirement will be instituted as soon as practically possible given the constraints of printed catalogues and college procedure. Because the purpose of the initiative is to enhance, not restrict, enrollment, students will be allowed to re-take Introductory Psychology to satisfy the C+ requirement subject to College and University provisions on course repetition.

Initiative 2.4: Enhance the Honors Experience

The department has a special responsibility to challenge and engage our best students. To ensure that the experience of our honors students is appropriately rigorous, we propose two changes to our Honors program. First, we will require a psychology GPA above 3.5, as opposed to the current 3.3, for admissions to our Honors program. Currently, approximately one-half of our graduating seniors qualify for the honors program, with many of these students having GPAs between 3.3 and 3.5. Reducing the number of honors students through this change will allow us to deepen the honors experience as described in our second proposal. Moreover, raising the required GPA to 3.5 has the added benefit of bringing our requirements in line with prima facie or common sense definitions of an honors student, (i.e., a student whose psychology GPA is above 3.5 has received more A's than B's in the major).

Second, we will require our honors students to take either a 100 level statistics course or a graduate psychology course in addition to an honors seminar. This additional course will substitute for one of the 4 required 100 level courses. Our hope is that this additional specialty course will facilitate the engagement of honors students in collaborative research with faculty. (See item 4 under initiative 2.2)

Goal Two: Measurable Outcome

While many of the preceding initiatives have directly measurable outcomes, (e.g. the completion of a curriculum review), we wish to examine two additional measures to help assess whether we have enhanced the quality of the Psychology major. The first measure is the mean non-psychology GPA of psychology majors. This serves as a general index of our major's academic aptitude. The second measure is the proportion of psychology majors who attend graduate school. Increases in this proportion provide the evidence of increased quality in the major. We will examine changes in these measures over the next three years.

**Concluding Remarks:**

In this document we propose two goals for the Department of Psychology. Our first goal is to enhance our national reputation and research prominence. To accomplish this goal, we present a focused, integrated hiring plan that unifies individual Ph.D. programs and the department. Moreover, we recognize that increasing graduate student funding is essential. We propose re-allocating existing department resources to support multi-year packages for students, as well as faculty attempts to procure external funding.

Our second goal is to enhance the quality of our undergraduate major. To accomplish this goal, we have revised our advising procedures and, in the coming year will undertake a comprehensive review of our curriculum. In addition to these

measures, we are revising our requirements for entrance to the major and our honors program to ensure a more rigorous educational experience.

Accomplishing the preceding goals will help create a focused department supportive of its research and educational mission.

## APPENDIX A Position Requests

### **Position Requests, Listed by Graduate Program (priority number in parentheses)**

#### Clinical Psychology

**Prevention of Health Problems and/or Psychological Disorders among Child or Adolescent Urban/Diverse populations.** This position is directly related to Department theme of Psychological Processes in health and illness. The focus on processes will take the form of prevention or promotion processes at the cognitive, personality, social, and community level. This position is a direct fit with the Clinical Program Theme "Prevention and Health Promotion in Urban Communities. The person will also relate to the Social Program theme of "Psychosocial Determinant of Health" and provide an extension to child or adolescent issues for the Social Program. Collaborative research should occur both among clinical faculty and with social program faculty. (Priority 1)

**Prevention of Health Problems and/or Psychological Disorders among Adult Urban/Diverse populations** The same fit with priorities and with department and program theme will be present. The same collaboration with the social program will be present as for the first position. (Priority 4)

#### Cognitive Neuropsychology

**Biological Bases of Human Memory and Cognition** The Cognitive Neuropsychology Program requests a new faculty position in order to hire an individual that has research interests in the biological bases of human memory and cognition. We would like to hire a candidate with primary interests in experimental psychology and cognitive neuroscience. The person could study brain functions in normal individuals, or study the bases of abnormal processing in patients with neurological or neuropsychiatric disorders. We would prefer a person who could teach a course that would be relevant to students in the clinical program. The person might also engage in directing clinical students' research and collaborate with clinical faculty, while adding a biological and cognitive component to areas of on-going clinical faculty research. (Priority 2)

**Biologically-plausible Computational Models of Memory and Cognition** The Cognitive Neuropsychology Program requests a new faculty position for an individual who develops and tests biologically-plausible computational models of memory. As understanding of the biological underpinnings of memory increases, there is currently a strong effort among memory theorists to generate computational models that can account for the pattern of memory impairments and spared cognitive function observed after brain injury, as well as more general memory phenomena. This faculty position aims to recruit a researcher with exactly this combination of expertise. This position will add a new and highly visible approach in memory research to the Department's repertoire, with excellent prospects for external funding as both NIH's and NSF's Cognitive Neuroscience panels

support computational research. Given this person's computational expertise, they may also contribute to the instructional needs of the Department in the areas of statistics and research methodology. (Priority 5)

Applied Social Psychology

**The Effects of Social influence, Social Support and Persuasion Processes on Mental and Physical Health.** Social cognition and social influence are two major psychological approaches to the study of health. We have just hired in the area of social cognition, social influence would be an important complementary position. Social influence can be studied by examining social support processes; influence of parents, peers, media, culture; impact of social rejection and discrimination. Psychologists have examined these aspects of social influence for their impact on lifestyle-related behaviors such as smoking, substance use, exercise, diet, and sexual behavior as well as on mental health outcomes such as depression. This position would fit very well with social and clinical program themes. (Priority 3)

**Medical Decision Making.** This position would bridge some of the interests in social as well as cognitive psychology. Individuals are frequently confronted with the need to make decisions about their health habits (e.g., should I drink less), health intervention alternatives (e.g., should I see an acupuncturist), and treatment adherence (e.g., should I follow my doctor's recommendations). To make these decisions, individuals consider and combine many beliefs and cognitions. An expert in this area would conduct research on these decision-making processes. (Priority 6)