



**STRENGTHENING THE COMMON CORE OF
THE INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY COURSE**

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APA Board of Educational Affairs Working Group on
Strengthening the Common Core of the Introductory Psychology Course

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION MARCH 2014

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Psychology Course

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STRENGTHENING THE COMMON CORE OF THE INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY COURSE

Participants at the 2008 APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education held at the University of Puget Sound articulated several high-priority recommendations that were later published in *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline* (Halpern, 2010) and embodied in the *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* (APA, 2011). Conference participants made two strong recommendations about the importance of the introductory psychology course (henceforth Intro Psych). The first was that the Intro Psych course should be a prerequisite for all other psychology courses. The second was that the Intro Psych course should mirror the core model for the psychology major.

To address these recommendations, APA's Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) established the Working Group to Strengthen the Common Core of the Introductory Psychology Course. BEA charged the working group to:

1. Examine the common core of the Intro Psych course at the college level, including the content, outcomes, possibility of a laboratory component, and implications for a major versus a nonmajor directed course.
2. Recommend potential action steps to BEA on strengthening the common core.

BACKGROUND

P psychology has been an active scientific area for more than 100 years (Shaughnessy J. J., Zechmeister, E. B., & Zechmeister, J. S., 2009). The field has made significant technological and methodological innovations, with new areas evolving and preexisting areas merging. Yet, most Intro Psych textbooks are composed of the same 14–16 chapters (Griggs & Jackson, 2013), although the amount of coverage of each topic has varied somewhat over the last three decades (Griggs, 2014). Correspondingly, the structure of the Intro Psych course has remained relatively consistent.

Although there have been major studies of the psychology curriculum over the years (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Perlman & McCann, 1999; Stoloff et al., 2010), most did not focus on the content or organization of Intro Psych. However, one notable exception, Homa and colleagues (2013) examined the objectives and content of Intro Psych courses and found considerable variability nationally, with some courses focused more on psychology as a science, and others focused on psychology as a means of self-understanding and improvement.

Psychological research explores the enormous complexity of human behavior and contributes in important ways to solving a wide range of problems. For example, many pressing contemporary social problems (and likely problems of the next century) reflect, to an appreciable extent, modifiable cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Zimbardo, 2004). These problems include prejudice and discrimination, exploitation and violence, depression and dysphoria, child neglect and parental divorce, and the rising medical costs associated with behavioral and cultural factors. More young people die or become disabled from unfortunate behavioral choices (e.g., drug use, gang violence, drinking and driving) than from all diseases combined (Gurung, 2014). In addition, many intriguing scientific problems humankind faces—ranging from the

neural basis of thought, emotion, and a sense of the self to the cognitive operations underlying effective problem solving and optimal decision making; the sociocultural factors that make education effective and enjoyable; and the best means of dealing with life's stressors—fall within the purview of psychology (Zimbardo, 2004).

At the same time, psychological science has a demonstrated track record of enhancing human functioning at both the micro and macro levels (e.g., APA, 2005; 2010). The procedures for optimizing human potential—successful parenting and aging, athletic and artistic flow, extraordinary memory and reasoning, maximizing the development of intelligence, environmental conservation—are but a few topics that have received attention in psychological laboratories.

The contemporary Intro Psych course structure may not accurately reflect the discipline as it stands today. Specifically, most textbooks still treat different areas of psychology (e.g., social, personality) as if they are distinct and studied in isolation of other areas. Whereas, psychology, as represented in the *National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula* (henceforth, *Standards*; APA, 2011) and *Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (henceforth, *Guidelines*; APA, 2007; 2013), is divided into “domains.” However, with few exceptions, these documents and the concept of domains have not been well translated to textbooks.

Few attempts have been made to capture the evolving nature of our discipline. Many contemporary textbooks include sections and

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writing styles that connect areas of the field (e.g., Cacioppo & Freberg, 2013; Myers, 2013; Tavis & Wade, 2001; Weiten, 2012) and begin to reflect domains versus silos. Tavis and Wade (2001) presented one early approach for reconceptualizing psychology, organizing the content of psychology around five major approaches (biological, learning, cognitive, sociocultural, and psychodynamic), and then including a section on “putting the perspectives together.” As textbook publishing has changed, it is also possible for individual instructors to personalize their text and create options that include major components of their preferred introductory text but exclude chapters or content they may prefer to emphasize in an alternative or integrative manner.

More recently, Cacioppo (2007) presented another alternative representation of modern psychology. In his view, many of the most exciting advances in psychology today are emerging at the intersections—across traditional training areas within psychology and across disciplines. For example, understanding romantic relationships (a perennial student favorite) can involve neurochemistry (e.g., oxytocin) and social (self-fulfilling prophecies), personality (e.g., traits), and cognitive psychology (e.g., automatic thoughts). Comprehensive understanding of the mind and behavior requires a combination of perspectives. A student cannot develop a comprehensive understanding of behavior by focusing on only a biological or a social perspective (Cacioppo, 2013). No longer simply a collection of independent domains based on historical or administrative distinctions, psychology in the 21st century appears to be becoming an integrative multilevel science. Specifically, there has been a trend in the direction of partitioning the science of mind and behavior into different levels of organization (e.g. biological, cognitive, and social), with each level contributing to our understanding of human behavior. Additionally, there are cross-cutting perspectives that offer valuable insights into the mind and behavior (e.g., cross-cultural, diversity, individual variations).

In this report, we summarize previous efforts to create a common core for the Intro Psych course and address the question of whether such a core is desirable. We first review historical attempts to create a common core and research on what is taught in Intro Psych. Then, based on a 2-year review of extant information on the Intro Psych course from a variety of sources (e.g., Homa et al., 2013, publisher surveys, expert teachers), we advance five recommendations regarding Intro Psych. These recommendations are intended to help teachers of Intro Psych design a high-quality foundation for the discipline of psychology as it exists today.

HISTORICAL ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A COMMON CORE

There have been many calls for national guidelines and/or a common core relating to different aspects of Intro Psych. More than 70 years ago, Wolfe (1942, p. 687) suggested Intro Psych should have five goals: (a) teach facts and principles of psychology, (b) develop scientific methods or habits of critical thoughts, (c) provide better ability in making personal adjustments, (d) prepare students for later courses or interest them in psychology, and (e) teach what psychology is and is not or eliminate popular superstitions. Given the emergence of psychology as a hub science (Boyack et al., 2005), the goal of providing nonmajors as well as majors an appreciation for the reach of psychological science into nearly every facet of human life could be added to this list. More recently, Smith and Fineburg (2006) drew attention to the lack of consistency in Intro Psych and suggested using the *Standards* and the *Guidelines* to help shape Intro Psych.

The *Standards* (APA, 2011), first published by APA in 1999 and revised in 2005 and 2011, defines psychology content for the high school classroom. In the document, the standards are structured as seven overarching content domains (i.e., scientific inquiry, biopsychological, development and learning, sociocultural context, cognition, individual differences, and applications of psychological science), with each domain including standard areas that cover the breadth of Intro Psych. Each domain's standard areas include relevant unit topics such that by instructors' teaching at least one unit from each domain, students in high school psychology courses receive a representative picture of contemporary psychology. The *Standards* could consequently also be used to organize, plan, and direct college-level Intro Psych (Smith & Fineburg, 2006).

The *Guidelines* (APA, 2007) captures "a set of optimal expectations for performance at the completion of the baccalaureate degree by students who major in psychology. The document outlines 10 goals and suggested learning outcomes that represent reasonable departmental expectations for the undergraduate psychology major across educational contexts" (APA, 2007, p. v).

The most recent revision of the *Guidelines*—*APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major 2.0* (APA, 2013, hereafter *Guidelines 2.0*) — incorporates changes that reflect emerging best practices and integrates psychology's work with benchmarking scholarship in higher education. *Guidelines 2.0* abandoned the original distinction between psychology-focused skills and psychology skills that enhance liberal arts development. Instead, the new *Guidelines 2.0* describes five inclusive goals for the undergraduate major that represent more robust learning and assessment activities (APA, 2013). Like the *Standards, Guidelines 2.0* (especially Outcome 1.2a, p. 18) can also help shape a common core for Intro Psych.

Conceivably, Intro Psych could mirror the core model for the psychology major, but there is little consistency in requirements for the major (Stoloff et al., 2010). The undergraduate psychology major differs markedly from one institution to another in areas such as semester hours needed, the implementation of capstone courses, or even required and elective class topics. Dunn and colleagues (2010) suggested a curricular model for the psychology major and recommended that Intro Psych mirror the same model. But their recommendation from the 2008 APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education remains just that—a recommendation without implementation or other action.

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SHOULD INTRO PSYCH COURSES HAVE GREATER COMMONALITY?

In short, yes. “Given the ubiquitous relevance of psychology to other majors and fields, most jobs, and the world in general, as well as the many contributions an understanding of psychology can have to personal growth and development, all students need to receive a common core of content” (Dunn et al., 2010, p. 59).

Intro Psych enrolls between 1.2 and 1.6 million students annually (Steuer & Ham, 2008); it is the second most popular college course in the nation, second only to English composition (Adelman, 2004). Intro Psych is required for the psychology major in 98% of U.S. colleges (Stoloff et al., 2010) and has been taken in high school by 60% of college students (Adelman, 2004). Intro Psych serves not only as a prerequisite for other courses in the discipline, but for many college students, as their only formal exposure to psychological science.

Greater commonality across courses provides a singular message to students and the public about what constitutes the field of psychology. High commonality across all institutions offering the course maintains consistency in what majors and students taking the course as a general education requirement receive. “Internal and external pressures on the discipline ... suggest a need for a common, coherent core curriculum for the undergraduate psychology major” (Dunn et al., 2010, p. 53). Having more conceptual consistency for Intro Psych will map nicely onto calls for a common curriculum (for the major), the use of quality benchmarks (Dunn, McCarthy, Baker, Halonen, & Hill, 2007), and the *Guidelines 2.0* (APA, 2013). Having conceptual consistency in Intro Psych should also help students prepare for the forthcoming behavioral components in entrance exams for medical school (i.e., MCAT 2015).

There is also an additional compelling reason to have greater conceptual consistency. Currently, psychology lacks a universal assessment of knowledge. Assessment, whether across instructors or across time, at the department level or across institutions, necessitates a similar, if not standardized experience. Fields



such as physics have common content assessments such as the Force Concept Inventory (Hestenes, Wells, & Swackhamer, 1992). Chemistry, through the American Chemical Society's Division of Chemical Education Examination Institute, also has examinations used by campuses nationally (<http://chemexams.chem.iastate.edu/about-us>). The *Guidelines 2.0* (APA, 2013) reminds us that the discipline of psychology has three assessment instruments related to content (Psychology Areas Concentration Achievement Test, GRE Subject Test in Psychology, Major Field Test in Psychology), but none of these are commonly used to measure the extent to which Intro Psych students master content. It will benefit the field to have a universal assessment.

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WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT IN THE INTRO PSYCH COURSE?

There is a surprising dearth of information on this point. The majority of research focuses on content analyses of Intro Psych textbooks. Textbooks have little similarity in content and vary in length and comprehensiveness (Griggs, Bujak-Johnson, & Proctor, 2004; Landrum, Gurung, & Spann, 2012). Miller and Gentile (1998) found little consensus among instructor ratings regarding important topics and those topics covered in the class. Our working group found only one published article on whether Intro Psych courses share learning objectives or a common core.

Homa et al. (2013) examined student learning objectives and course content in 158 Intro Psych syllabi. Student learning objectives were mapped to the 2007 version of the *Guidelines*. More than 50% of the syllabi contained objectives specific to the science and application of psychology (knowledge base, research methods, application). Analysis of content coverage revealed that instructors spent significantly more time on topics related to physiological and cognitive psychology and significantly less time on topics related to the history and scope of psychology, research methods, and developmental psychology. Importantly, this practice occurred across instructors in all specialty areas. Instructors spent a disproportionate amount of time on certain content areas. Additionally, instructors whose expertise was in social and clinical/counseling psychology spent more lecture time on their own areas than on some other content areas.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of the material described above and in line with the BEA charge, the working group advances the following five recommendations:

1. Foster greater conceptual consistency in Intro Psych content
2. Provide similar content for Intro Psych for both psychology majors and nonmajors
3. Incorporate research experiences in the Intro Psych course
4. Foster special training opportunities for Intro Psych instructors
5. Offer a national assessment plan for Intro Psych

RECOMMENDATION 1

Foster Greater Conceptual Consistency in Intro Psych Content

The working group examined existing domain models for psychology (e.g., *Standards, Guidelines*) and created a new conceptualization of the course with explicit ways to better reflect the contemporary state of the field (e.g., a call for integration). We explicitly used the five domains outlined in the *Guidelines* and each of the seven domains outlined in the *Standards*, although we modified some of the labels and changed where in the model each domain is covered, as described below. To provide instructors and institutions with the maximum amount of flexibility and choice, our recommended model demarcates key conceptual areas of the field instead of specific content. This conceptual level allows individual instructors academic flexibility in topic selection and precludes the need for multiple models while still allowing for the creation of courses that share a common basis.

Intro Psych should be designed to serve as a stand-alone structure (for students taking it as part of a general education requirement) or as the foundation for the psychology major. We build on this metaphor and represent recommendations for teaching the course using an architectural analogy.

The content of Intro Psych can be conceptualized using the schematic of a classic Greek structure complete with pillars—the fundamental precepts of the field (see Figure, p. 14). Consistent with national recommendations for the major and with reviews of the contemporary nature of the field, the working group recommends that instructors of Intro Psych cover the following.

1. **THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD:** The scientific method is the true foundational building block and core of our discipline. Consistent with Goal 2 of *Guidelines 2.0* (APA, 2013, pp. 20-25), students in Intro Psych should learn skills involving the development of scientific reasoning and problem solving, including effective research methods. Students should learn basic skills and concepts for interpreting behavior, studying research, and applying research design principles to drawing conclusions about behavior.

2. **CROSS-CUTTING THEMES:** Consistent with our goal to move away from a silo model of psychology to better represent the cross-cutting themes in our field today and to honor calls for infusion of certain topics across the course (e.g., Dunn et al., 2010; Littleford & Nolan, 2013; Trimble, Stevenson, & Worell, 2003), we recommend the following should be covered for each topic included in the course. Just as concrete is a composite of different ingredients, each pillar is composed of different elements that are cross-cutting common themes in the field. This recommendation explicitly elevates the importance of the cross-cutting themes over that of specific content topic areas (e.g., those seen in the pillars that follow). This practice should ensure that important issues such as diversity and ethics are frequently on students' radar versus seen as only solitary requirements, boxes to be checked off as completed.

- **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY:** What are variations across individuals and roles, including those based on age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, disability status, language, and socioeconomic status? Choose at least two.
- **ETHICS:** What are the major ethical considerations for conducting research or applying the topic or phenomenon?
- **VARIATIONS IN HUMAN FUNCTIONING:** What are the positive and negative extremes of the phenomenon being studied? Highlight failures and successful examples.
- **APPLICATIONS:** How does the content of the course apply to everyday life? How can the content of the course contribute to improving one's life and addressing societal problems?

3. **GENERAL CONTENT COMMONALITY:** We recommend that the Intro Psych syllabus include at least two topics from each of the main pillars of the field modified from the domains specified in the *Standards and Guidelines 2.0*.

The pillars encompass all chapters in psychology textbooks (material within parentheses below) while also mapping onto course names, contemporary political structures, PhD training programs, and departmental core courses. We desired pillar labels to be easily identifiable as major chapters and sections in Intro Psych textbooks, providing students with points of connection that prior domain language did not easily afford.

- **PILLAR 1: BIOLOGICAL** (e.g., Neuroscience, Sensation, Consciousness, Motivation)
- **PILLAR 2: COGNITIVE** (e.g., Cognition, Memory, Perception)
- **PILLAR 3: DEVELOPMENT** (e.g., Learning, Life Span Development, Language)
- **PILLAR 4: SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY** (e.g., Social, Personality, Intelligence, Emotion, Multicultural, Gender)
- **PILLAR 5: MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH** (e.g., Abnormal, Health, Therapies)

4. **INTEGRATION:** The structure is capped by an explicit focus on integration that ties together the different areas into a coherent whole and represents the integrative nature of contemporary psychology. In contrast to focusing on just cognition or biology or social situations, modern psychology integrates different approaches. Just as was recommended for the call for capstone courses for the major (Dunn et al., 2010), the working group recommends that students in Intro Psych receive explicit examples of how the different pillars of psychological science are integrated. For example, conflict in close relationships can be better understood by personality characteristics, social or situational factors, developmental histories of each partner, and underpinning biological factors. The point is to underscore that each pillar/domain has substantive implications for the others in the pursuit of comprehensive psychological explanations and applications. The in-depth study of any one of these domains is essential, but a comprehensive understanding of the mind and

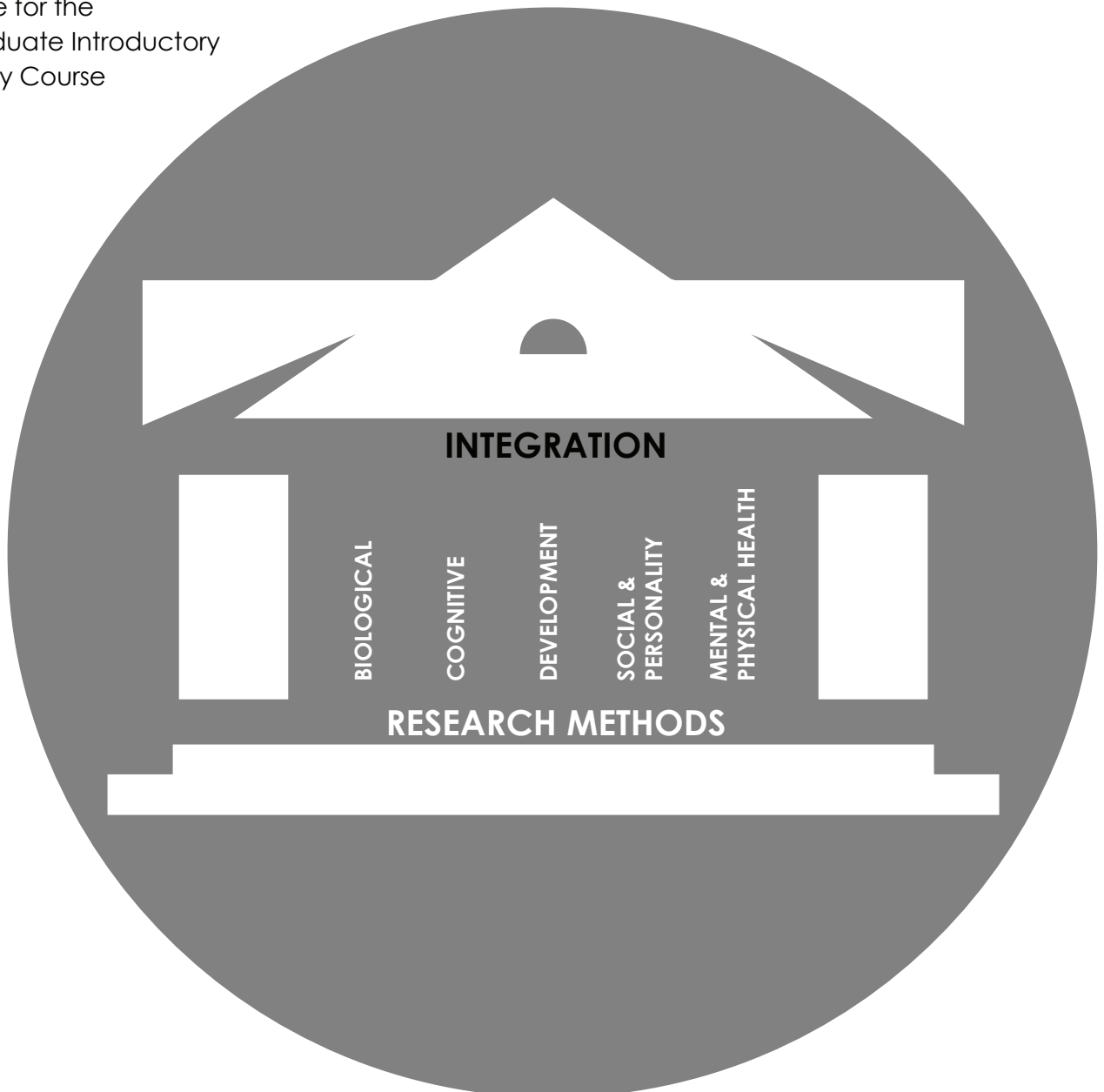
behavior is more likely to be achieved by an integration of what we know and can learn across multiple levels/perspectives than by focusing on individual domains.

from each of five pillars and also including the four common elements whenever possible may seem a difficult task. We believe with better resources for training (see Recommendation 4 below) and reorganizing or pruning the extent to which some topics are currently covered (e.g., an instructor need not always lecture on an entire chapter), this recommendation is manageable. If an instructor keeps to the minimum requirement and selects two topics from each pillar, he or she will still have a little more than a week to cover each topic in a standard 14-15

We acknowledge this content recommendation may present an imposing task to many faculty members, although many others will already be covering content consistent with our recommendation. These recommendations are textbook agnostic and do not necessitate the adoption of one book over another. Covering two topics

FIGURE

A Structure for the Undergraduate Introductory Psychology Course



week course. We provide examples for how this recommendation can be followed in Appendixes 1 and 2.

Appendix 1 has a simple assignment to aid with the integration aspect, and Appendix 2 has specific examples of how the four common elements can be conveyed for each topic in each pillar. Whereas an instructor or department may consider teaching the course over two semesters to better capture all elements of the recommended model, there is little evidence to suggest two semesters of Intro Psych benefit student learning (Thornton, 2006), and we envision this model suitable for single-semester delivery.

In offering these recommendations for Intro Psych content selection, the BEA Working Group has tried to strike a nuanced balance by providing flexibility yet guidance. We aimed to avoid either a prescriptive, overly standardized approach on the one hand and the extant idiosyncratic approach on the other. We explicitly linked and meshed our recommendations with existing APA documents such as the *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major 2.0*, the *APA National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula*, and documents emerging from the Puget Sound conference. Whereas we considered presenting a number of different models for instructors or departments to pick from, we believe one model will better enable national consistency. The working group unanimously agreed that a single but flexible model would better serve instructors of psychology. This decision was supported by feedback on the model from participants at the 2014 NITOP meeting and the 2013 Stanford Psychology One Conference.

That said, we note that our single model has considerable flexibility built into it. There are many topics to pick from within each pillar and a multitude of ways an instructor could feature the recommended common elements. We also provide examples of alternative ways to conceptualize and cover central pillars within the introductory course. There are many different ways

of teaching Intro Psych under the banner of one strong single model. We cherish academic freedom and recognize the diversity of faculty members, teaching situations, and student audiences. At the same time, a mature science should be able to agree upon and communicate its unifying conceptual core while embracing diversity.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide Similar Content for Intro Psych for Psychology Majors and Nonmajors

The Intro Psych course should contain the same content and experiences for all students at a given institution regardless of why students are taking the course (Halpern, 2010). Although some psychology departments may be tempted to create an Intro Psych course specifically for psychology majors, there is no evidence in the literature that suggests having two courses is needed.

Departments that want a more robust Intro Psych course for their majors may instead modify other requirements and sequencing. For example, although most psychology departments require their majors to take research methods courses early in their undergraduate experience (Stoloff et al., 2010), departments that want to provide more early experiences might be better served by creating another course, such as one that addresses career preparation (Atchley, Hooker, Kroska, & Gilmour, 2012; Brinthaupt, 2010; Thomas & McDaniel, 2004), preparation for the major (Atchley et al., 2012; Dillinger & Landrum, 2002), or writing in the major (Goddard, 2003).

RECOMMENDATION 3

Incorporate Research Experiences in Intro Psych

Introductory courses in most sciences are joined with required laboratories to foster a deeper, integrated understanding of the science. It is not sufficient to learn the laws and equations of chemistry or physics without hands-on experience with classic and contemporary methods. In fact, offering Intro Psych with a lab component has been shown to be effective at increasing scientific literacy (Thieman, Clary, Olson, Dauner, & Ring, 2009), and a call to do so has been issued before (Berthold, Hakala, & Goff, 2003). However, most institutions do not or could not offer a lab component for the Intro Psych course. In a sample of 364 institutions, only 6% offered a lab component (Stoloff et al., 2010). Instructors of introductory psychology courses may not include laboratory experiences in part because of limited resources and in part because the methods and content are thought to be self-evident.

Exposure to research or including a laboratory component in some form in introductory psychology may be particularly important because students arrive with so many misconceptions about the discipline. For instance, many students begin Intro Psych believing that psychology is mostly about psychotherapy and relationships (Stalder & Stec, 2007), when in fact it is also about the brain, information processing, genetics, behavioral plasticity, and social determinants and moderators. Students also tend to arrive believing they already know the causes of behavior. For example, it is commonly said that birds of a feather flock together, but of course it is also commonly said that opposites attract. Everyone knows that two heads are better than one but also that too many cooks spoil the broth. Students are often surprised to learn they hold many logically inconsistent beliefs about the causes of behavior.

The BEA Working Group is well aware that many smaller colleges or departments will not be able to fund separate lab courses or complex research assignments; nonetheless, there are a number of creative ways to integrate more scientific research throughout the course. One option is to use virtual experiments as class assignments. APA maintains the Online Psychology Laboratory (OPL), which can



help with this. Simple assignments using OPL can give Intro Psych students a hands-on taste of doing research.

A second option is to provide lab-related activities through existing departmental resources. For example, students at the University of Chicago are introduced to the discipline through a foundations in psychology course in which faculty work with each student to design a simple study for which they do a literature search, collect data, conduct rudimentary statistical analyses, and prepare a poster for a science fair similar to those seen at psychology national meetings. Other innovative models for integrating lab-like, hands-on experiences for Intro Psych students can be developed with existing faculty, graduate students, and even advanced undergraduates under supervision.

A third option is to provide students an opportunity to participate in upper level students' and faculty research or other experiential learning experiences (Vespia, Wilson-Doenges, Martin, & Radosevich, 2012). A fourth option may be to require students to read, summarize, and critique research articles.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Foster Special Training Opportunities for Intro Psych Instructors

Psychological science has changed dramatically over the past few decades, and Intro Psych should reflect the evolving science of psychology. Faculty members who teach Intro Psych may need to adjust both the content of the course and their methods of teaching it. In particular, it is important for faculty to understand and implement new technologies from clickers to Mechanical Turk (an online system run by Amazon.com to provide quick, easy, and inexpensive access to online research participants; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013) in their courses. The teachers of Intro Psych have a variety of existing resources for their continuing education (e.g., Society of Teaching Psychology conferences, APA programming, *Teaching of Psychology*, *Current Directions*, *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*), but we believe the larger challenge involves convincing faculty members of the importance of changing their textbooks or teaching styles instead of relying on what has worked reasonably well in the past. Given the strong relationship between faculty development activities, on the one hand, and their influence on changes in teaching behavior, classroom performance, and students' learning outcomes on the other hand (Chism, Palmer, & Price, 2012), additional training opportunities are of great importance.

Below is an initial list of suggestions and resources for faculty members' and teaching assistants' (TAs) ongoing learning to support teaching a contemporary Intro Psych course.

1. **Seek out training in interdisciplinary science (or attend conferences that focus on integrative science).** Interdisciplinary science was the focus of the 2011 APA Education Leadership Conference, and related training is likely to become more available in the future. Some interdisciplinary meetings are quite narrow (intersection of fields), and others are quite broad. Attendance at the latter types of conferences is more likely to foster integration.
2. **Complete an Intro Psych-focused teaching practicum or teaching assistantship during graduate training.** Consider developing a "Teaching of Psycholo-



gy” course for TAs linked to Intro Psych so that the TAs’ time with the students serves as a practicum for their teaching.

3. **Attend conference sessions throughout your career relevant to the teaching and learning of psychology.** At present, a variety of excellent training opportunities are available at the APA and APS national conferences and multiple regional teaching conferences. The Society for the Teaching of Psychology held two best practices conferences on Intro Psych. Stanford University is now offering a summer conference that focuses exclusively on Intro Psych. Within these conferences, workshop and exchange opportunities that allow for the sharing of creative ideas about teaching Intro Psych would also be useful. Perhaps a larger challenge is to convince more professors and TAs to attend these types of teaching conferences.
4. **Maintain current knowledge of psychology through journal articles focusing on the theory and scholarship of the practice of teaching.** Some journals already include regular features about teaching Intro Psych (e.g., *APS Observer*, *Teaching of Psychology*, and more specialized journals such as the *Psychology of Women*). In addition, a variety of review journals offer integrated updates of the field and can serve as excellent continuing education opportunities. Some of these journals include *Annual Reviews of Psychology*, *Current Directions*, and *Psychological Bulletin*. Once the findings of this BEA Working Group are disseminated, a series of relevant journal articles seems appropriate.
5. **Make use of the many online psychology teaching resources.** Information sharing has become increasingly efficient through the various websites and Internet-based options available to psychologists. For example, the APA Division 2 Project Syllabus could be used to model creative ways of organizing Intro Psych. The expansion of a catalogue of useful Internet-based resources is likely to be of value to Intro instructors (<http://intropsychresources.com/>).
6. **Create and use mentoring networks within national organizations and local communities of learning.** Mentoring relationships can be useful for enhancing creativity. APA’s Membership Board has created a group to put together a set of recommendations for creating mentoring programs with APA divisions as the target audience. Mentoring can also occur more locally, within colleges and universities, for example.
7. **Attend the many teaching-related workshops and conversations within one’s local teaching community.** Faculty from different fields and disciplines share common challenges in teaching introductory courses, and interdisciplinary workshops that focus on good pedagogy for the teaching of the social/natural sciences can be quite valuable. Cornell College, for instance, is part of a multi-institutional consortium that provides regular workshops on pedagogy, and “conversations about teaching” are held routinely on the local campus. The University of Chicago, for another instance, has a Center for Teaching and Learning (<http://teaching.uchicago.edu>) that provides a wide array of classes, workshops, resources, certification programs, and seminars to promote excellence in teaching. Most institutions of higher education have programs to develop and support excellence in teaching. However, many graduate students and faculty are unaware of these programs, and many of those familiar with the programs do not attend them.
8. **Read books on the scholarship of teaching and learning.** A variety of publishers (including APA Press) publish excellent sources on teaching. In the future, a book that provides examples based on the model that emerges from this BEA Working Group may prove of value.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Offer a National Assessment Plan for Intro Psych

Although our recommended model does not specify explicit content topics, the components of the pillars need to be assessed. As stated previously, the research is limited on what exactly takes place in the Intro Psych class. Most information on the Intro Psych course comes from publishers' market research (e.g., PubTracker®) and textbook extrapolations. To establish how our students perform or where reform is needed, we first need basic information on how the course is taught, how students perform on learning outcomes, and how reliable and valid the assessments are.

Guidelines 2.0 and the *Assessment Cyberguide for Learning Goals and Outcomes in the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (APA, 2009) provide learning outcomes. *Guidelines 2.0* also identifies potential assessment instruments for each of the outcomes. Regardless of whether instructors use the learning outcomes in *Guidelines 2.0* or their own, the working group believes a nationally coordinated focus on the assessment of Intro Psych learning outcomes in general is sorely needed. That can be better accomplished once a conceptual consistency becomes established across the discipline.

At the intro level, it would be beneficial for psychology to have a standard set of assessment questions, perhaps tied to the *Standards*, which can be used to assess student knowledge. Having a standard assessment would allow departments to compare their students directly with those of other programs. It would also be extremely useful as a research tool for studying effective pedagogies. Departments or faculty could pick and choose specific modules they want to assess, but there is no easy way to compare student accomplishments if there is no consistency of content.

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APPENDIX 1:

Psychology as an Integrated Science Assignment

Instructors can use this assignment to help integrate the different domains of psychology.

Why did Facebook become so popular? Why can't Congress work together to pass a federal budget? Why was I not invited to the party last Saturday night? Human behavior has multiple causes, sometimes involving interactions among two or more factors from different areas of psychology. This is the case for everyday behavior and for the big problems society faces today.

Pollution, global warming, education, poverty, terrorism, natural resource depletion, population growth, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, social injustice, hunger, and crime all involve behavioral processes shaped by factors moderated by or in interaction with other factors, ranging from biological to sociocultural perspectives. Because human behavior plays such an important role in each of these problems, psychology as an integrated, hub science has much to contribute to understanding and controlling them. Your challenge in this assignment is to show how different psychological factors or processes, individually or in combination, can influence an issue.

Specifically, your task is to pick a big problem from the list below and indicate theory and research in psychology that describe and explain the role people play in the creation of and solution to the problem. Your paper should be three double-spaced pages. Begin by defining the issue/topic. Look over your notes for the course so far and the chapters you have read and skim topics in the chapters remaining. Think about the areas of psychology that relate or pertain to your topic. Locate where your topic (or a related topic) is discussed in the text or in your notes. You do not need references beyond your class notes or the textbook.



Think about and include, where applicable, three of these five areas of content that may be interconnected in the overall system of your selected problem:

- Biological (e.g., neuroscience, sensation, consciousness, motivation)
- Cognitive (e.g., cognition, memory, perception)
- Development (e.g., learning, the needs and capabilities of children, adolescents, adults, and older adults)
- Social and personality (e.g., social, personality, intelligence, emotion, cultural, and gender differences)
- Mental and physical health (e.g., abnormal, health, clinical)

Pollution Global warming (Ineffective) Education Poverty Terrorism Natural Resource Depletion	Population Growth Nuclear Proliferation Pandemics Social Injustice Hunger Crime
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Also for this task, consider the following questions and how ethics, diversity, and applications may influence the resolution of the problem. For instance, what are the major ethical considerations of conducting research or investigating the behavioral aspects of the big problem you have chosen? What does psychological science have to say about how variations across individuals and roles (including those based on age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, disability status, language, and socioeconomic status) contribute to the problem and/or to the solution? What role do the variations you see across individuals (e.g., in terms of their capabilities and vulnerabilities) play in the creation or solution to the big problem you've chosen? How might this big problem affect our everyday lives if it gets much worse, and how might our everyday lives differ if we were to behave in ways that were to help solve this big problem?

APPENDIX 2: Addressing the Four Common Themes by Topic/Pillar

In this table, the APA Board of Educational Affairs Working Group on Strengthening the Common Core of the Introductory Psychology Course suggests discussion topics and demonstrates how each satisfies one or more of the four cross-cutting themes recommended for coverage in the course. The working group recommends that instructors first cover the scientific method and then select at least two topics from each of five pillars (i.e., biological, cognitive, development, social and personality, and mental and physical health) based on instructor preference.

Each pillar encompasses four common cross-cutting themes: social and cultural diversity, ethics, variations in human functioning, and applications. Note that one topic within a pillar may cover multiple themes. The examples provided are designed to illustrate how instructors might incorporate the different elements for each major topic in psychology and may serve as starting points for discussion; they are not intended to be prescriptive.

SCIENTIFIC METHOD	Social and Cultural Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Discuss some examples of how the APA Code of Ethics pertains to psychological research.		X		X
Discuss the importance of conducting psychological research with groups other than just undergraduates in the U.S.	X	X		
Provide an example of experimental research with infants.	X	X		X
Provide an example of correlational research from personality psychology.	X	X	X	
Discuss some examples of research examining learning and memory and how that research can benefit both students and older adults.	X			X



PILLAR 1: BIOLOGICAL Choose at least two content areas, such as Neuroscience and Sensation.		Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Neuroscience	Discuss some of the gender differences and gender similarities in brain structure and function.	X	X		X
	What are some ways in which the brain of a person diagnosed with schizophrenia has been determined to be different from the brain of a person without schizophrenia?	X		X	X
	Discuss what we have learned about the brain from treatment needs of individuals whose corpus callosum was severed due to severe epilepsy.	X	X	X	X
	Discuss how our knowledge of brain plasticity can help explain rehabilitation following a stroke.	X		X	X
Sensation	Discuss the ethical considerations of cochlear implants and their impact on the deaf community.	X	X		X
	People with certain physical disabilities suffer with constant pain. How can pain research help?	X		X	X
	People with synesthesia have a mixing of the senses. Can people without synesthesia imagine what it is like to see sounds? How are these experiences similar or different?	X		X	
	How has research on hearing influenced policy about loud work environments? How has hearing impairment been reduced?		X		X
Consciousness	Discuss the impact of shift work on circadian rhythms.	X			X
	Discuss the ethical complexity of conducting research on illegal drug use.		X		X
	Discuss narcolepsy—what is it and what do we know about it?	X		X	
	How can students use the information derived from the research on sleep to improve their own sleep habits?				X
Motivation	Discuss the tendency for both medical professionals and the general public to asexualize people with physical disabilities.	X			
	What are the ethical considerations of conducting sexuality research?		X		
	Discuss paraphilias.			X	
	How can psychological research on sexuality improve people's lives?				X

PILLAR 2: COGNITIVE Choose at least two content areas, such as Memory and Perception		Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Cognition	How has the combination of the availability heuristic and terroristic acts affected perceptions of different cultural and religious groups?	X			X
	Do psychology students have an ethical obligation to share what they know about cognitive biases with friends and family?		X		
	Share examples of experts using intuition appropriately.			X	X
	Discuss how cognition research is helping to build smart computer systems.				X
Memory	Some people who have experienced the trauma of war have flashbacks. Discuss the memory processes that produce these memories and their unbidden recall.	X			X
	Discuss the ethical considerations of research with individuals who have long-term memory deficits.		X		
	Discuss the World Memory Championship. What skills have the participants developed that make them especially good at these memory tasks?			X	X
	Discuss how courts are more skeptical of eyewitness testimony based on memory construction research.				X
Perception	Discuss some ways in which culture influences the perception of illusions.	X			X
	What are the ethical considerations of giving people in pain a placebo in treatment studies?		X		
	Discuss synesthesia.			X	
	Discuss how perception research can help us understand why we are fooled by magicians.				X



PILLAR 3: DEVELOPMENT Choose at least two content areas, such as Learning and Lifespan Development		Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Learning	Discuss cultural differences regarding the use of corporal punishment.	X			
	How might we evaluate the research conducted by Watson and Rayner on Little Albert in light of the current APA Ethics Code? How does this evaluation differ if based on ethical standards from their time?		X		
	What are the implications from research that suggests people with psychopathy respond to reinforcement and are affected little by punishment?			X	X
	How can a self-reinforcement program help us make changes in our own behavior?				X
Lifespan Development	Given what we know about adolescent development, is it appropriate to give life sentences for crimes committed by teenagers? What role should psychologists play in this discussion?		X		X
	Discuss temperament in infants and its relationship to the development of personality.			X	
	What are some cultural differences in the experience of aging?	X			
	What are the ethical considerations for conducting research with children?		X		
Language	Discuss how sense of self differs for people who are bilingual depending on the language they are speaking.	X			
	Given how easy it is to pick up a second language as a child, should all/more schools introduce a second language before high school?		X		
	Why is it that some people seem to be able to learn languages much more quickly than others?			X	
	Given what is known about language development, what advice is supported by research about how parents can help their children become proficient in reading, writing, and speaking?				X

PILLAR 4: SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY Choose at least two content areas, such as Social and Gender.		Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Social	Discuss some real life impacts of cultural differences in attribution given that research suggests that Western cultures lean more toward dispositional attributions and Eastern cultures lean more toward situational attributions.	X			
	Some social psychological research uses deception. What are the ethical considerations when conducting such research?		X		
	Discuss what research tells us about how a few people can influence larger groups. Provide examples.			X	X
	What are the dangers of "groupthink" in a business environment? How can groupthink be avoided?				X
Personality	The personality profiles that result from testing may differ for the same individual based on which language they used to take the test. What are the implications of this finding?	X			
	Discuss the ethical considerations of using personality tests for hiring decisions.		X		X
	Discuss the Big Five personality traits.			X	
	Discuss how some matchmaking agencies use personality tests to make their matches. Do you think their approach is justified by the research? Are there some risks?				X
Intelligence	What is your interpretation of the consistent finding that the correlation between general mental ability (GMA) and work performance increases as occupations are rated higher on prestige?			X	X
	What are the ethical considerations of how intelligence test results are used?		X		
	Why might society wish to consider intellectual appraisals when determining punishment/treatment for crimes committed by people with developmental delays?	X	X	X	X
	How might children benefit from what psychological science tells us about environmental influences on intelligence?		X		X

Emotion	What evidence is there regarding gender differences in reading emotion in others?	X			
	Is it appropriate to prescribe drugs to people who are perceived to be too emotional?		X	X	
	Discuss characteristics that might predispose an individual to road rage and the ways in which these individuals could more appropriately manage their emotions.			X	X
	How can emotion research help law enforcement officers detect lies? What are the ethical limitations of this research?		X		X
Multicultural	Discuss differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures.	X			
	Do you believe there are basic human rights, regardless of culture? If so, what are these basic rights?		X		
	Give examples of behaviors that are acceptable in one culture but may be viewed as symptomatic of a psychological disorder in another.			X	
	How can an appreciation of different cultural values benefit an employee in a business environment?				X
Gender	How do gender roles differ across cultures?	X			
	What are the ethical considerations around gender assignment surgery for intersex infants?		X	X	X
	How are people who are very masculine or very feminine perceived, regardless of gender?			X	
	How do we learn gender roles? How do those gender roles affect our relationships with others?				X

PILLAR 5: MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH Choose at least two content areas, such as Abnormal and Health.		Diversity	Ethics	Variations in Human Functioning	Applications
Abnormal	Discuss cultural differences in the expression of depression.	X		X	
	What are the ethical considerations of conducting research on people who are currently experiencing psychosis?		X	X	
	What factors make a person more or less likely to develop PTSD?			X	X
	How might our knowledge of the epigenetics of schizophrenia improve treatment?				X
Health	How do cultural and religious communities affect health behavior?	X			
	What are the ethical considerations for putting volunteers in highly stressful situations to investigate the impact on health?		X		
	Discuss individual variations in the ability to cope with stress.			X	
	How can health psychology help people engage in more healthy behaviors?				X
Therapies	Discuss different cultural attitudes toward psychotherapy.	X			
	When researching the effects of psychotherapy with people who are suicidal, what are the ethical considerations of withholding treatment from the control group?		X	X	
	Discuss the difficulty in providing psychotherapy to people with personality disorders.			X	
	Can our knowledge of effective psychotherapeutic techniques help us teach people psychological first aid?		X		X

STRENGTHENING **THE COMMON CORE** OF THE INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY COURSE



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