

American Psychological Association Working Group on Internationalizing the Undergraduate Psychology Curriculum: Report and Recommended Learning Outcomes for Internationalizing the Undergraduate Curriculum (November 2005)

**Neil Lutsky, Carleton College
Judith Torney-Purta, University of Maryland College Park
Richard Velayo, Pace University
Val Whittlesey, Kennesaw State University
Linda Woolf, Webster University
Maureen McCarthy, American Psychological Association**

With special thanks to the Carnegie Corporation and the American Council on Education for their generous support of this project.

This document represents the work of the APA Working Group on Internationalizing the Undergraduate Psychology Curriculum. The document does not represent policy of the American Psychological Association.

Foreword

In 2004 the Carnegie Corporation awarded a grant to the American Council on Education (ACE) to coordinate a multidisciplinary effort to promote the internationalization of teaching and learning at colleges and universities in the United States. The American Psychological Association was one of four organizations (i.e., Association of American Geographers, American Historical Association, American Political Science Association and American Psychological Association) selected to participate in this initiative. Specific goals set forth for the project included:

- To articulate global learning outcomes relevant to specific disciplines and to communicate these outcomes to the membership of the participating associations;
- To take a leadership role in promoting the internationalization of student learning and to provide concrete strategies that other disciplinary associations can adapt;
- To help faculty incorporate an international dimension into their teaching and the learning experiences of their students;
- To develop action plans for each association to promote internationalization in its discipline; and,
- To disseminate these approaches to a wider group of disciplinary associations.

To address this charge, the American Psychological Association

formed a small working group of psychologists with an international perspective and relevant expertise. The members of this working group were nominated by APA boards and committees, including APA Division 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology), APA Division 52 (International) and the Committee on International Relations in Psychology (CIRP). The working group met twice during the 2004-2005 academic year and produced a draft statement of learning outcomes along with an action plan.

The working group then solicited feedback on its draft report and recommendations via email from members of the APA Committee on International Relations in Psychology (CIRP), board members of the Division of International Psychology, and individuals (both international and within the U.S.) identified by members of the working group as having particular interest or expertise in this matter. Attendees at a conversation hour held by the working group during the 2005 APA convention provided additional feedback. We are grateful for the suggestions we received, which addressed the following questions posed by the working group:

- (1) Do you have suggestions for the justification of this document? Are there omissions?
- (2) Do you have suggestions for the wording and organization of the stated goals?
- (3) Do you have suggestions for the promotion/dissemination of these goals?

Results of this project will be submitted to the American Council on Education in order to complete the multidisciplinary requirements of the grant to APA. This final report and recommendations for learning outcomes will be submitted to the APA Board of

Educational Affairs for approval. The recommendations will then be disseminated to undergraduate psychology programs.

Introduction

The mission of psychology, as embodied in the Mission Statement of the American Psychological Association, is “to advance scientific interests and inquiry [on psychology], and the application of [psychological] research findings to the promotion of health, education, and the public welfare” (American Psychological Association, 2005). Quite appropriately, neither of these charges is limited to a particular geographic area. In fact it is fundamental to basic science to assess the specificity or universality of findings across diverse populations, geographic and otherwise, and to applications to promote human welfare worldwide and to be adjusted as appropriate to particular conditions. In sum, the mission of psychology is inherently international in its scope and sensitivities.

Attention to the international character and responsibilities of psychology’s mission has increased recently due to factors that have strengthened connections between once physically distant peoples. These factors include travel and migration, global communication and culture, contemporary geopolitical events and conflicts, international business and commerce, global environmental concerns, and international human rights. Moreover, the consumers psychology serves (e.g., in classrooms and applied settings) are increasingly aware of the potential impact of these internationalizing forces in light of their own backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. Thus, psychology in the twenty-first century is becoming more appreciative than ever of the importance of pursuing its mission globally.

Doing so would build upon psychology’s history as an international discipline. Early psychologists opened laboratories, engaged in practice, and began teaching in such diverse countries as Japan, Mexico, India, Argentina, New Zealand, and Russia. Indeed, the First International Congress of Psychology took place in 1887. Today, as the number of psychologists burgeons around the globe, psychology is more international than ever before (Rosenzweig, 1999). Adair, Coelho, and Luna (2002) found that psychology has a “significant presence” in 47 countries and a “minimal presence” in at least 41 additional countries. Adair, et al. also report that 45% of articles indexed in PscINFO®, a major psychology electronic database, were written by authors from outside the United States. Psychology’s knowledge base in science and practice is, then, international as well.

The American Psychological Association has played a prominent role in recognizing and promoting this internationalization of the discipline. In 1944, APA established the Committee on International Relations in Psychology (CIRP), and in 1961 it opened an Office of International Affairs (OIA). APA is also home to Division 52: International Psychology. Moreover, APA’s Policy and Planning Board (2005) recently identified “Developing a Global Perspective” in the discipline as a primary APA goal for the next 15 years.

These trends and efforts raise a key question: how ought the undergraduate psychology curriculum address the internationaliza-

tion of psychology? We believe internationalization ought to be an important priority in the undergraduate psychology curriculum. What we mean by “internationalization” in this context is elaborated in the learning outcomes we later specify but can be summarized as follows: an understanding of how psychologists pursue psychological science and apply psychology around the world and of how scientists and practitioners address psychological phenomena that potentially vary internationally.

We see support for our view concerning the importance of internationalization in a recent report by the working group on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies (2002), endorsed by APA’s Board of Educational Affairs. The report specified “Sociocultural and International Awareness” as one of 10 primary undergraduate psychology learning goals and associated five learning outcomes with this goal. These learning outcomes are:

- (a) Interact effectively and sensitively with people from diverse backgrounds and cultural perspectives.
- (b) Examine sociocultural and international contexts that influence individual differences.
- (c) Explain how individual differences influence beliefs, values, and interactions with others and vice versa.
- (d) Understand how privilege, power, and oppression may affect prejudice, discrimination, and inequity.
- (e) Recognize prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors that might exist in themselves and others.

These student learning outcomes constitute an important first step when thinking about how undergraduate education might incorporate a global perspective on psychology, but they are neither focused on nor specific about internationalization.

Unfortunately, evidence suggests the existing psychology curriculum in the United States pays little attention to internationalization (Woolf, Hulsizer, & McCarthy, 2002). This may be due to obstacles faculty face when they consider incorporating an international perspective into their teaching, including a lack of familiarity with the international literature, the absence of institutional support for internationalization, and competing priorities. What this suggests is that a reassertion of the need for internationalization of the psychology curriculum is in order and that psychology faculty might value more specific guidance on what internationalization entails and on how to manage professional challenges to internationalization.

Why is it important to recognize internationalization in the teaching of psychology? First, it is scientifically unsound to ignore a significant portion of the research literature from which students might learn simply because that research is conducted outside the boundaries of the United States. Second, work in international psychology raises fundamental questions for psychological understanding and practice. For example, international research may help students appreciate how universally applicable particular findings or practices might or might not be. This may help students recognize demographic, socio-cultural, economic, political, religious, ethnic, and other potential sources of variability in psychological phenomena. Familiarity with approaches and practices internationally may also enrich students’ understanding of psychology and help them become more thoughtful about the as-

sumptions they bring to psychology. Third, internationalization itself warrants particular attention as an important phenomenon in the world in which today's students live. Fourth, there are compelling reasons for attention to this issue to be found in the *Resolution on Culture and Gender Awareness in International Psychology*, adopted by the APA Board of Directors and Council of Representatives in August of 2004. How, for example, will increased communication, interaction, movement, and influence affect psychological processes, practices, and outcomes? Finally, an internationally-informed psychology will help meet the needs, interests, and appreciations of the increasing numbers of international students at North American institutions.

What follows specifies goals and associated learning outcomes for the undergraduate psychology curriculum to address the current conditions, challenges, and responsibilities of internationalization. We believe these goals and learning outcomes should be addressed throughout the psychology curriculum and not merely in isolated cross-cultural or multi-cultural psychology courses. And we believe that internationalization represents one of the most important priorities we face as undergraduate educators seeking to prepare students for twenty-first century life in psychology and in the world.

Learning Goals and Outcomes to Internationalize Undergraduate Psychology

Goal 1: Psychological knowledge in international perspective. Students should recognize, acknowledge, and describe sociocultural differences and commonalities between people, and consider how the diversity of human behavior around the world contributes to the study and practice of psychology.

Outcome 1.1: Students will demonstrate the ability to articulate the psychological implications of demographic, sociocultural and socioeconomic characteristics and variability in the world, and assess the extent to which the phenomena studied in contemporary psychology reflect and are influenced by that variability.

Outcome 1.2: Students will be knowledgeable about the contributions of important figures from other countries and about the work of international organizations in the development of psychology as a field. Students will make efforts to integrate knowledge about these contributions into their own work, study, and academic endeavors as appropriate.

Outcome 1.3: Students will study a region of the world other than their own and be able to point out the differences and commonalities between aspects of their cultural background and those of the people in that region in light of one or more psychological theories.

Outcome 1.4: Students will be able to recognize the historical and current state of psychology as a discipline in another region of the world of particular relevance to them.

Outcome 1.5: Students will be able to analyze models of how culture influences behavior (e.g., cognitive, social, interpersonal).

Goal 2: Methodological issues in international research. Students should be aware of research methods and skills necessary for international research competence.

Outcome 2.1: Students will have the skills to access research literature from journals outside the United States (e.g., the ability to search databases, and the ability to read in a language other than their native language).

Outcome 2.2: Students will identify and appreciate the contribution to psychology of research methodologies conducted throughout the world and of methods used in that research, including observations, interviews, ethnographies, and mixed-method studies.

Outcome 2.3: Students will be aware of ethical concerns in research in other countries, (e.g., the rights of participants, their protection from harm, and credit to researchers from those countries).

Outcome 2.4: Students will understand that constructs developed in one cultural setting do not have identical meanings in other settings, resulting in the need to adapt measures and check with expert informants (as well as translating and back-translating questions).

Outcome 2.5: Students will guard against making sweeping generalizations about a culture that are based on small unrepresentative samples (and will recognize other problems with external validity).

Goal 3: Discipline of psychology in the international perspective. Students should be aware of how the discipline of psychology is developed, studied, and applied in and across cultures.

Outcome 3.1. Students will recognize that theories and concepts may be influenced by the cultural, social and political systems existing at the time of their development.

Outcome 3.2. Students will understand psychological theories and concepts developed in other countries.

Outcome 3.3. Students will understand ways in which psychology is studied, applied, and practiced in other countries.

Outcome 3.4: Students will understand that psychological education, training, and processes for reviewing ethical issues in research differ according to the structure of university systems and routes to obtaining credentials or academic qualifications in different countries.

Goal 4: Psychology and interpersonal understanding. Students should be able to use their psychological knowledge and understanding of cultural differences and behavior to demonstrate skills and values that will help them function effectively in a complex multicultural global world.

Outcome 4.1: Students will examine their cultural biases and values and how these may influence interactions/relationships with others from different backgrounds in light of psychological theories and findings.

Outcome 4.2: Students will be able to use psychological concepts to facilitate effective interactions with people whose beliefs, philosophies, and values differ from their own.

Outcome 4.3: Students will recognize the role of language in understanding individuals and cultures.

Outcome 4.4: Students will show awareness and sensitivity to perspectives that are different from their own.

Goal 5: Psychology and global issues. Students should be able to recognize, appreciate, and describe the role that psychological knowledge plays in addressing issues related to the human condition from a global perspective.

Outcome 5.1. Students will be able to apply their knowledge of psychology to issues of global concern and human welfare (e.g., poverty, health, migration, the status of women and children, human rights, international conflict, and the natural environment).

Outcome 5.2. Students will have an appreciation of the value of psychology in the pursuit of social justice in ways that are sensitive to the cultural context.

Outcome 5.3. Students will be able to recognize the role of national and cultural identity in their understanding and treatment of other people.

Outcome 5.4. Students will understand how privilege, power hierarchies, and oppression affect prejudice, discrimination, and inequity. Students will recognize prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior in themselves and others.

Outcome 5.5: Students will understand that the processes of internationalization and globalization (e.g., migration, international commerce and communication, international cooperation and conflict) influence both individual and group psychological processes.

Action Plan

In addition to establishing goals for internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum, the working group developed a plan for implementation and dissemination. The first step was to distribute the document to a wider audience of scholars with expertise in internationalizing the discipline for the purpose of obtaining additional feedback and cross validation. The working group received feedback and made adjustments to the goals and student learning outcomes that reflected the collective wisdom of the experts.

Clear implementation of the goals and learning outcomes will require widespread dissemination. The learning goals and outcomes for internationalizing the curriculum will be submitted to the APA Board of Educational Affairs for approval. Endorsement of the document will allow for dissemination as a resource to the undergraduate education community. This document will be distributed by the Education Directorate through the website and relevant publications and conferences of the APA. Finally, the working group will continue to work toward development of a manuscript to be submitted to the *American Psychologist*, the organization's flag-

ship professional journal.

Several unfunded recommendations were also put forth by the working group. Key among them were suggestions to expand the clearinghouse of materials that faculty could immediately use for course development. The working group identified several resources that already exist through the Society for the Teaching of Psychology Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology (OTRP). Unfortunately, faculty members are often unaware of these resources. One possible outcome from this project will be an increased awareness of internationalizing the curriculum, encouraging an increased utilization of existing resources. Ultimately, the actions taken thus far by the working group will result in an increased attention to internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum.

References

- Adair, J. G., Coelho, A. E. L., & Luna, J. R. (2002). How international is psychology? *International Journal of Psychology, 37*, 160-170.
- American Psychological Association. (2005). *About APA*. Retrieved September 14, 2005, from <http://www.apa.org/about/>
- Policy and Planning Board, American Psychological Association. (2005). APA 2020: A perfect vision for psychology; 2004 five-year report of the Policy and Planning Board. *American Psychologist, 60*, 512-522.
- Rosenzweig, M. R. (1999). Continuity and change in the development of psychology around the world. *American Psychologist, 54*, 252-259.
- BEA Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies. (2002). *Undergraduate psychology major learning goals and outcomes: A report*. Retrieved September 16, 2005 from <http://www.apa.org/ed/pcue/reports.html>.
- Woolf, L. M., Hulsizer, M. R., & McCarthy, T. (2002). *International psychology: A compendium of textbooks for selected courses evaluated for international content*. OTRP-Online, published by Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology, Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Division 2, APA). Retrieved September 16, 2005 from <http://www.lemoyne.edu/OTRP/teachingresources.html#international>