

Principles for Quality Undergraduate Psychology Programs

The American Psychological Association (APA) recognizes the importance of undergraduate education in advancing psychology as a science, promoting human welfare, and fostering students' growth and development. There are inevitable and desirable differences among undergraduate programs, based on institutional missions, faculty, student populations, and available resources. There are also common principles that characterize quality undergraduate programs.

These principles are intended to guide faculty and administrators in their ongoing efforts to renew undergraduate psychology. The principles emphasize (a) students who enroll in psychology programs and individual courses; (b) faculty whose teaching, scholarship, and collegial affiliations enhance their students' learning; and (c) curriculum that shapes students' study. These principles are based on recommendations from faculty who participated in the APA National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology, held at St. Mary's College of Maryland, June 1991. (See Handbook for Enhancing Undergraduate Education in Psychology, [McGovern, 1993].) Conference participants included psychologists from high school, community college, liberal arts college, and comprehensive and research university settings. A draft of these principles was circulated to over 3000 psychology departments in the United States and Canada and to governance groups in the American Psychological Association. The Conference Steering Committee completed the final version of these principles, incorporating comments that were received from a variety of sources.

Students

Quality undergraduate psychology programs should:

1. Set clear and high expectations for students, promote active learning, and give students systematic assessment and feedback on their progress.
2. Recognize that students learn about psychology in multiple settings classrooms, laboratories, field experience, internships, cocurricular programs (e.g., psychology clubs and science fairs) and through formal and informal contacts with faculty and student peers.
3. Be enriched by the diverse characteristics of students, drawing on and responding to their differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status.
4. Foster effective student advising that goes beyond providing information about institutional procedures and policies by motivating students
 - a. to explore and develop their values, interests, abilities, and career and life goals
 - b. to encourage the student to consider the many postbaccalaureate educational possibilities, including graduate and professional school.
 - c. to become increasingly independent in their decision making
 - d. to play an active role in shaping advising policies and procedures.

5. Support effective student advising by providing faculty
 - a. unequivocal administrative support for the activity
 - b. continuing education opportunities in innovative advising methods
 - c. tangible rewards for excellence, including the consideration of quality advising in tenure and promotion decisions.

Faculty

In quality undergraduate programs:

1. Faculty foster students' learning through teaching, scholarship, and service. These three activities are complementary, and quality programs recognize excellent performance in all three.
2. Faculty are enriched by fostering different perspectives among one's colleagues and one's students, by respecting different cultural, age, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, and ethnic minority perspectives, by learning about different specialization areas and theoretical orientations, and by appreciating different contributions to excellence made at different stages of one's academic career.
3. Faculty are enriched by learning from colleagues at different institutions and levels, including secondary schools, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities.
4. Faculty development is considered a lifelong process and is nurtured by
 - a. periodic opportunities to enrich one's teaching and scholarship
 - b. opportunities for collaborative relationships in teaching and scholarship among colleagues
 - c. periodic evaluation and feedback to all faculty on their teaching, scholarship, and service contributions
 - d. regular institutional support to enhance and improve one's teaching
 - e. access to resources and information about the psychology of diversity.

Curriculum

In quality undergraduate programs:

1. The curriculum enables students
 - a. to think scientifically about behavior and mental processes
 - b. to appreciate and respect others
 - c. to pursue a variety of postbaccalaureate alternatives including employment and graduate or professional school.
2. The curriculum is based on clear and rigorous goals. These include
 - a. synthesizing the natural science and social science aspects of psychology by requiring students to take courses in both knowledge bases
 - b. evaluating research methods (quantitative, qualitative, archival), research designs (experimental, correlational, case study), statistics, and psychometric principles
 - c. appreciating the ethical practice of scientific inquiry
 - d. thinking scientifically, understanding the relationships between theories, observations,

and conclusions; critically evaluating the empirical support for various theories and findings

e. speaking and writing effectively in the discourse of the discipline

f. respecting the diversity of behavior and experience and appreciating the rich opportunities for science and social relationships that such differences provide

g. understanding how the study of psychology enables individuals to make informed judgments which strengthen the community and build public policy.

3. Faculty determine the best structure of a curriculum to achieve the goals they identify for their institution. For example, a common structure for the baccalaureate curriculum includes
 - a. a required introductory course
 - b. methodology courses
 - c. advanced content courses
 - d. integrating capstone experience.
4. Faculty determine the essential elements of a curriculum to achieve the goals they identify. Common elements of the curriculum include
 - a. multiple opportunities for students to be active and collaborative learners
 - b. research projects to help students learn the science of psychology
 - c. fieldwork, practica, and community service experiences to help students learn the applications of psychology
 - d. an emphasis on learning across the curriculum about ethical issues and values
 - e. multiple courses and research methods which heighten students' understanding of diversity in behavior.
5. Faculty establish mechanisms to assess the curriculum. Essential elements of an assessment program include
 - a. clearly stated and achievable outcomes for the curriculum and other program-related experiences
 - b. multiple measures of students' learning
 - c. planned opportunities for systematic feedback to students on their progress
 - d. specific plans to use data assessment to improve individual course instruction and the overall curriculum
 - e. opportunities to communicate assessment results to the multiple constituencies of undergraduate psychology.

Original Draft, January 1992; Revised, August 1993; Revised, February, 1994

Sherrill Simons

Education Directorate

American Psychological Association

750 First St., N.E.

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 336-5970

E-mail: education@apa.org

