

APA PRINCIPLES FOR

# Quality

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION *in*

# PSYCHOLOGY



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION



# APA PRINCIPLES FOR Quality UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION *in* PSYCHOLOGY

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American Psychological Association  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
202-336-6140  
E-mail: [Education@apa.org](mailto:Education@apa.org)

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# PREFACE

The *American Psychological Association (APA) Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* was approved as APA policy by the APA Council of Representatives in February 2011. The principles were developed by the Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) Steering Committee for the 2008 APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology, held in Tacoma, WA. Participants at the 2008 conference articulated a number of recommendations for enhancing the teaching and learning of undergraduate psychology. These principles were patterned after the *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Psychology Programs*, adopted by APA in 1994 and archived in February 2011. Initial development of these principles resulted in a book chapter published in *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline* (Halpern, 2010). As recommended by the participants and the BEA Steering Committee for the 2008 APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology, there are five important principles, along with 30 recommendations:

- **Quality Principle 1:** Students are responsible for monitoring and enhancing their own learning.
- **Quality Principle 2:** Faculty strive to become scientist-educators who are knowledgeable about and use the principles of the science of learning.
- **Quality Principle 3:** Psychology departments and programs create a coherent curriculum.
- **Quality Principle 4:** Academic administrators support and encourage quality practices in teaching and learning.
- **Quality Principle 5:** Policymakers and the general public understand why psychological literacy is necessary for informed citizens and an effective workforce.

Although these principles were designed to enhance teaching and learning in undergraduate education in psychology, they have broad application and could be used to promote high-quality teaching and learning in any academic discipline.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Why Do We Need the APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology?

The APA Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) Steering Committee for the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology designed these principles for quality teaching and learning for all stakeholders in higher education—students, faculty, departments, academic administrators, public policymakers, and the general public—to ensure that students are prepared for the challenges they will encounter as workers, family members, and concerned citizens in the new global century. These principles describe a set of recommendations for creating a world-class educational system that provides students with the workplace skills needed in this information age; a solid academic background that prepares them for advanced study in a wide range of fields; and the knowledge, skills, and values they will need to enter and succeed in the workforce and thrive in their daily lives.

The *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* represents an important statement from the national disciplinary association during a time when undergraduate education in the United States is under much scrutiny from the public. This document follows several related major projects of the last decade that have focused on quality improvement in psychology education. For example, in 2005, the APA Council of Representatives approved the *National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula* (APA, 2005); approval of the revised *National Standards* occurred in 2011. In 2006, the APA Council of Representatives approved the *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (APA, 2007) to describe a set of optimal expectations for student performance at the completion of the baccalaureate degree. The APA Council of Representatives also received a *Report on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing in a Developmentally Coherent Curriculum* (APA, 2008). In 2008, APA convened the National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology on the campus of the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, WA. As a result of these important initiatives and the deliberations at this conference, the BEA Steering Committee prepared this new set of *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology*.

## Use of the Term *Principles*

In the context of this document, the term *principles* is used to describe these recommendations for quality undergraduate education in psychology. The term *principles* can be interpreted in the same way as the term *guidelines*. Use of the term *guidelines* generally refers to recommendations that are aspirational in intent. As noted in the *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology*

Major (APA, 2007), the higher education community and other scientific disciplines use the term *guidelines* in a similar way. Moreover, as used in this document, use of the term *principles* is consistent with the provisions of the APA policy on *Developing and Evaluating Standards and Guidelines Related to Education and Training in Psychology: Context, Procedures, Criteria, and Format*, Section I C (1)(2004), as passed by the APA Council of Representatives.

## **Process of Developing the Quality Principles**

The *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* was developed to offer recommendations for enhancing the teaching and learning of undergraduate psychology, yet the principles can be used as guidelines for other disciplines. These principles were patterned after an earlier set of recommendations, the *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Psychology Programs* (APA, 1994), developed after the 1991 APA National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

A copy of the unapproved *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* was published in *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline* (Halpern, 2010), a major outcome of the 2008 APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology. The conference steering committee provided leadership for the final version of the *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology*. The steering committee members represented a variety of institutional perspectives on the nature of the undergraduate curriculum and its aims and included Diane F. Halpern (Chair), Barry Anton, Bernard C. Beins, Charlie T. Blair-Broeker, Charles L. Brewer, William Buskist, Bettina J. Casad, Wallace E. Dixon, Jr., Yolanda Y. Harper, Mary E. Kite, Patricia Puccio, and Courtney A. Rocheleau.

The BEA Steering Committee was informed by the comments provided by many individuals, APA governance groups, APA divisions, undergraduate psychology departments, and many other organizations in psychology, including the Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology (COGDOP); the Council of Undergraduate Programs in Psychology (CUPP); the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR); regional psychological associations; and the state, provincial, and territorial psychological associations.

Under the leadership of Diane Halpern, members of the BEA Steering Committee reviewed all of the submitted comments and developed a revised draft of the *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* in early 2010. Subsequent to legal review, this revised document was available for 90 days of public comment. APA governance groups and subsequently, the



APA Board of Directors, received the revised document in the fall of 2010. In February 2011, the APA Council of Representatives adopted the *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology*.

## Resource Documents

Resources used to create the *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* included drafts of book chapters reporting on the recommendations of the 2008 National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology. In addition, the BEA Steering Committee consulted the earlier recommendations from the 1991 APA National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology. Information about the St. Mary's Conference was published in an APA book entitled *Handbook on Enhancing Undergraduate Psychology* (McGovern, 1993).

Members of the BEA Steering Committee reviewed the document to ensure its consistency with other APA policy documents, such as the *APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2002) and the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* (APA, 2003). This procedure is specified in the APA Policy on *Developing and Evaluating Standards and Guidelines Related to Education and Training in Psychology: Context, Procedures, Criteria, and Format* (APA, 2004).

## Feedback

The BEA Steering Committee views the *APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology* as a “living document.” Accordingly, the Education Directorate will implement a systematic plan for the future review and revision of this document to reflect national and international developments in the discipline and in education. These principles are scheduled to expire 10 years from the date of their adoption, in February 2021. This is consistent with provisions of APA Association Rule 30-8.3, requiring cyclical review of approved standards and guidelines within periods not to exceed 10 years. After this date, users are encouraged to contact the APA Education Directorate to determine whether this document remains in effect.

Comments and suggestions on these principles are welcome. Feedback may be sent to:

Precollege and Undergraduate Education  
Education Directorate  
American Psychological Association  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242

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The following principles for undergraduate education in psychology are designed for creating a world-class educational system that provides students with the workplace skills needed in this information age; a solid academic background that prepares them for advanced study in a wide range of fields; and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will enhance their personal lives. A quality undergraduate education is designed to produce psychologically literate citizens who apply the principles of psychological science at work and at home. The American Psychological Association (APA) urges all stakeholders in undergraduate education in psychology to incorporate these principles in establishing goals and objectives that fit their specific institutional needs and missions.

## QUALITY PRINCIPLE 1:

### Students are responsible for monitoring and enhancing their own learning.

The entire educational enterprise centers on the learner and ways to make learning effective, durable, and transferable across academic domains and to out-of-school contexts. The most important variable in learning outcomes is what students do to make learning effective, durable, and transferable.

## Recommendations

### 1. Students know how to learn.

Knowing how to learn includes using learning strategies such as spacing study sessions; processing information for meaning; generating responses to enhance memory; explaining concepts; using visual-spatial, verbal, and kinesthetic strategies; and becoming actively engaged in the effortful process of learning. Students can reasonably expect faculty and support staff at their institution to assist them in learning to learn.

### 2. Students assume increasing responsibility for their own learning.

Students need to develop the skilled habit of metacognition, which includes knowing when they need help with learning and when they are learning well on their own. Early in the semester, students who need assistance with learning should seek help from their professors and others on campus who can support learning (e.g., staff at student learning centers).

### 3. Students take advantage of the rich diversity that exists in educational institutions and learn from individuals who are different from them.

Projections suggest that there will be no single majority group in the United States by the year 2050 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008), when most of today's students will still be in the workforce. Demographers expect other regions of the world to become increasingly diverse as well. People vary in multiple ways, including extent of ability and differences in race, ethnicity, country of origin, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status. The diverse characteristics of other students and faculty members provide learning experiences for the real-world tasks of understanding people who view events in the world from varying

perspectives. Learning from diverse students and faculty members is an important component of a quality education.

**4. Students are responsible for seeking advice for academic tasks, such as selecting courses in the approved sequence that satisfy the institution's requirements for the major and general education. They are also responsible for seeking advice about planning for a career that is realistic and tailored to their individual talents, aspirations, and situations.**

A corollary of this principle is that faculty and staff will be available to students and knowledgeable about requirements for the major and career options for majors in psychology.

**5. Students strive to become psychologically literate citizens.**

The goal of becoming psychologically literate citizens is to prepare students for the demands of a global 21st century. Psychological literacy includes having a basic knowledge of the subject matter of psychology, valuing scientific thinking, acting ethically, recognizing and fostering respect for diversity, and being insightful about one's own and others' behavior and mental processes. Access to information from distant countries has made students global citizens, even if they have never traveled outside their home towns, and enhances their ability to see issues from multiple perspectives. Thus, psychologically literate citizens value international perspectives on psychology and willingly engage with citizens from countries other than their own.

## QUALITY PRINCIPLE 2:

Faculty strive to become scientist–educators who are knowledgeable about and use the principles of the science of learning.

Students need knowledgeable and caring faculty to achieve their learning goals. Thus, the quality principles for faculty in higher education and other places where students learn are closely tied to the principles of the science of learning. The science of learning refers to the body of knowledge about how people learn, including how brains develop and what works to enhance comprehension, retention, transfer, and creative use of information. To be effective educators, faculty should know and apply the principles from the science of learning.

## Recommendations

**1. Faculty provide instruction in the ethical standards that undergird the discipline of psychology and model this behavior across professional settings.**

Faculty behave ethically in all of their interactions with students, in their research, and in all aspects of their professional and personal lives, thereby serving as excellent role models for their students. Faculty can infuse across the curriculum opportunities for students to think about new and old ethical dilemmas. To develop ethical standards in students, faculty provide them with a framework in which they can analyze new and emerging ethical issues, such as the use of memory-enhancing drugs, the use of psychosurgery as a means of treating some mental disorders, and the issue of whether teens should be held responsible as adults for criminal behavior.

**2. Faculty understand and apply a variety of learning principles and modes of learning, such as spaced practice, generation of responses, active engagement by students, group exercises, and explaining as a way of understanding, among others.**

Expertise in one's specialized subdiscipline in psychology is necessary but not sufficient to promote quality learning. A large and growing literature applies empirically derived outcomes from the science of learning to college settings and other places where people learn (e.g., high schools, media at home, the workplace). Faculty should know how to teach the information in their specialty content areas and in general psychology in ways that promote deep understanding, long-lasting knowledge, and the ability to apply what is learned to disciplines outside of psychology and in settings outside the formal classroom. Faculty should know how to alter their teaching, depending on faculty and student learning goals,

background preparation, institutional mission, and personal preferences. Faculty should be responsive to the multiple ways in which students differ, including their racial and ethnic context, gender, gender identity and gender expression, and disabilities.

**3. Faculty make the same commitment to using the science of learning in their teaching as is required of scientist–practitioners who use the scientific findings of psychological research in their practice with clients and in other aspects of their professional lives.**

There are numerous ways to meet the objective of this principle. Faculty may collect teaching-related data to determine the effectiveness of various modes of teaching. In addition, they may become familiar with the scholarly literature on effective teaching and learning at their level of education. APA encourages all faculty to do both and to apply their knowledge of how people learn.

**4. Faculty engage in continuous, iterative inquiry into the success of their instruction in promoting appropriate learning, and they use that evidence to refine instructional practices to enhance the success of future students.**

Once evidence-based teaching practices are implemented, faculty should evaluate their success in ensuring that students are achieving course objectives. Over time the proportion of students achieving all course objectives and the proportion of students achieving each course objective should increase. Faculty should use the experience of other instructors and the principles of learning to identify and implement more effective teaching practices as indicated by successful student learning. Continuous adaptation of teaching practices to facilitate appropriate student success is an essential feature of excellent instruction.

**5. Faculty foster critical thinking by identifying the critical thinking skills and abilities they wish to promote in their classes and in the psychology major as a whole. Faculty periodically review these skills and abilities throughout the term and through all years of undergraduate education.**

Today's students get their information from many sources, including both credible and less than credible websites. The Internet is filled with misinformation (unintentional inaccuracy), disinformation (intentional inaccuracy), propaganda, and just plain nonsense. More than ever, the most important outcome for an undergraduate education is the ability to think critically, which includes skills such as identifying the credibility of information, providing reasons and counterarguments for conclusions, identifying and solving problems, recognizing propaganda and persuasive appeals, and using evidence when making decisions. Faculty should teach

critical thinking by identifying the skills and abilities they wish to promote in their classes and in the major as a whole. Involving students in research projects is an effective way to promote critical thinking. Thus, quality programs will include a variety of opportunities for student involvement in research. After identifying these skills, abilities, and research opportunities, faculty should periodically review them throughout the term and at graduation (or the end point of their psychology program, if it is not graduation).

**6. Faculty ensure that students develop basic skills in communication, numeracy, working cooperatively with others, and acknowledging and respecting diverse perspectives.**

The ability to think critically is an essential outcome of a quality education, but it is not the only basic skill that should be developed through challenging course work. Other essential skills include effective writing; fluent speaking; thinking with numbers; and working with others who may have diverse perspectives, values, attitudes, and skills. Faculty should concentrate on their students' development of these skills and provide systematic learning opportunities so that students can build on earlier skills as they become more proficient.

**7. Faculty ensure that diversity issues are carefully considered and infused throughout the curriculum.**

Culturally competent faculty will be (or will strive to become) at ease with and knowledgeable about the full range of students, staff, and other faculty on their campus and will communicate that knowledge to their students. Faculty are not providing their students with a quality education if they avoid or deny the importance of diversity that includes gender, race, age, ability, ethnicity, and other types of diversity as a central topic in psychology. We cannot teach about topics such as human development, love and sexual attraction, motivation, mental disorders, effective treatments for mental disorders, health and well-being, or the multitude of other topics in psychology without including diversity issues. Diversity is not simply an add-on to an otherwise overcrowded curriculum; it is central to understanding psychology. Inclusive excellence in academia exists when diversity and educational quality efforts are fully integrated and embedded into the core of the academic mission and institutional functioning both inside and outside of the classroom. Care should be taken to select textbooks and other learning materials that incorporate multicultural approaches and research and theories from multiple countries throughout the world in the presentation of material for the course. Psychology can only be a psychology for all people when it incorporates international perspectives throughout the discipline.



**8. Faculty become proficient in their use of commonly used technologies as a means to promote learning, and they encourage their students to develop these proficiencies as well.**

Today's students are *digital natives*, a term that is used to highlight the fact that they have never known a time when computers were not used for finding information, communicating with people around the world, or playing games and listening to music. Despite having been born during the decades of increasing computer use, not all students are proficient in using word processors, spreadsheets, presentation software, and other common programs that will be indispensable to their work lives. Students who do not have these necessary skills should be identified and strongly encouraged to learn the essential tools of their trade: computer programs needed for success as students and later as workers. Regardless of the students' level of expertise, their interests and abilities have been shaped by their technology-related experiences. Faculty should recognize that technology is a language that we need to communicate with our students. Faculty have a responsibility to assist students in learning these new technologies and in helping students adjust their learning behaviors in response to technology-mediated learning opportunities.

## **QUALITY PRINCIPLE 3:** Psychology departments and programs create a coherent curriculum.

Quality teaching and learning for undergraduates take place in an organizational context. Psychology departments and programs should be organized to support the learning goals of students and faculty.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Psychology as a scientific discipline is reinforced throughout the curriculum.**

We urge departments to consider ways to communicate psychology as a science to present and prospective students, to faculty in other departments on campus, and to the general public because of common misunderstandings about the nature of psychology. Psychology as a science can be made more prominent in several ways. These include changing a department's name to "Psychological Science"; seeking greater affiliation with departments in schools of science; or using other ways that are appropriate for each department's structure, history, and setting.

Research methods are at the heart of psychological inquiry and knowledge. They distinguish psychology as a science from psychology as a pseudoscience. For this reason, students should have a foundational understanding of basic research design and statistics early in their careers. Students can then build on their understanding in higher-level courses. When students acquire knowledge about the research basis of psychology early in their education, statistics and research topics can be included in later courses throughout the curriculum.

#### **2. Ethics and issues related to diversity are incorporated throughout the curriculum.**

Although specific courses may be offered that focus on ethics and/or different types of diversity (e.g., Asian American Psychology, Psychology of Women, Ethics in Psychology), ethics and diversity should be integrated within the context of most courses in psychology. International perspectives are essential because today's students communicate around the globe with the same ease that they communicate across campus. They need to understand how concepts such as need for harmony, filial piety, and communal good

differ around the globe and how people from various countries differ in their understanding of human thought and behavior.

**3. The introductory course and the psychology major provide a broad foundational understanding of the field from the perspective of content areas spanning levels of organization from cellular to ecological.**

Regardless of the structure of an individual department's curriculum, the major should incorporate multiple core perspectives on psychology. Because the introductory course is the only formal exposure to psychology that most educated citizens will have, this course should reflect the nature of psychology as a scientific discipline and include sections from different basic domains. Integration across perspectives should be incorporated into the introductory course by, for example, organizing the course topically or providing an in-depth topical "case study" of integration. Many of the controversies in psychology result from different perspectives on human thought and behavior, so in teaching about controversies (e.g., nature/nurture issues), faculty should expose students to theoretically diverse perspectives. Departments should consider carefully the depth and breadth of topics to cover in their classes. Content coverage has become a critical factor in the psychology curriculum as a result of the explosion of research findings and the plethora of important topics that could be included in any course.

**4. Curricula in psychology are designed to include course work in writing, speaking, and listening across the curriculum and courses that teach students how to think critically across a broad range of situations (see *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (APA, 2007)).**

The psychology curriculum as a whole should be designed to foster high-level learning outcomes that include essential skills such as thinking critically, learning effectively, writing, listening actively, and speaking fluently. The development of these essential skills should be coordinated across classes and systematically developed in the curriculum. Faculty should identify specific courses that enhance each of these skills and assess learning gains for students who take those courses. Large class size is often an impediment to the development of speaking and writing skills in psychology courses. When possible, students should have the opportunity to participate in seminar classes, laboratory experiences, or recitation sections in which the number of students is limited.

**5. Courses are sequenced in ways that allow upper division courses to build on concepts that are introduced in lower division courses.**

Students develop their ability to handle advanced concepts and procedures as they progress through the curriculum. For this reason, we recommend an initial broad course that introduces students to the discipline. Departments may wish to follow this course with statistics and research methods as soon as is feasible for a department's local conditions (e.g., within the constraints of transfer agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions), so that other, more content-oriented courses can illustrate the application of basic research design principles to specific domains of study. Other lower division courses may then follow, and they can be built on by the advanced requirements of upper-division courses.

A comprehensive introductory psychology course should be a prerequisite for all subsequent psychology courses. The introductory psychology course is one of the cornerstones of social science general education programs, and it should represent the entire field of psychology accurately and reinforce the basic premise that psychology is a scientific discipline. A quality curriculum in undergraduate education will also include an integrative capstone experience that allows students to see both the unity and differentiation of psychology's many subfields. There are many ways to achieve an integrative experience, including a course on the history and systems of psychology that allows students to trace the development of psychological thought, a contemporary issues approach in which current events are viewed from a psychological perspective, a senior-level overview course, or a research project in collaboration with a faculty member.

**6. Members of psychology departments work as a team to identify the desired learning outcomes and assessment of learning outcomes for the major, as well as any minor programs of study or concentrations they offer.**

Clearly articulated learning outcomes promote the development of a coherent curriculum in which students understand what they need to learn and in which faculty can examine what students actually learn. Undergraduate education cannot be improved without assessing what and how much students know when they complete programs. Learning outcomes can be assessed by numerous methods. Faculty members should be familiar with some of the ways academic learning outcomes are assessed, the strengths and weaknesses of each method, and the ways to use the methods that will improve teaching and learning.

**7. Being committed to quality undergraduate education, graduate programs ensure that all students are exposed to evidence-based strategies for communicating about psychology and that all those who teach as graduate students, or plan to have academic careers, receive instruction about effective teaching strategies. All graduate students need to learn how to communicate effectively with a broad range of stakeholders in psychology, including students, media, policymakers, funding agencies, and juries.**

Psychology faculty receive most of their advanced education in graduate programs in psychology, which is where they should receive instruction in how different modes of teaching lead to quality learning. Instruction in communicating about psychology is needed by all graduate students, whether or not they intend to become academic psychologists. Most doctoral students will teach in formal or informal settings at some point in their careers and be called on to educate diverse constituencies, including funding agencies, policymakers, and the media. Some graduate programs rely on a mentoring relationship with a single faculty member to foster teaching and communication skills. Although mentoring relationships are highly desirable, they are not sufficient for teaching graduate students about the science and art of teaching and communicating with diverse audiences in ways that take into account their prior knowledge and biases and promote understanding and retention of information. This recommendation is essential for educating the general public about the scientific underpinnings of psychology and its application to a wide range of contemporary challenges, such as energy consumption, intergroup conflict and prejudice, and mental disorders, to name just a few.

**8. As a contribution of psychology to the public good, courses include knowledge and skill acquisition that is relevant to students' lives (e.g., an applied experience and/or study abroad).**

Students should acquire knowledge and skills that they can use in their personal lives, families, careers, and communities. Psychologically literate citizens will be able to apply what they have learned in their psychology courses in planning their professional lives, meeting family obligations, and engaging in civic activities.

Learning is more durable and more likely to transfer when applied to relevant, real-world problems. Student internships, externships, volunteer activities, service learning, and work in a research laboratory along with certain types of paid employment allow students to apply what they are learning to real-world problems. APA recommends an applied learning experience in the major, whenever this is possible. Study abroad can provide a life-changing experience as students learn from and with peers whose life views may differ from their own.

## QUALITY PRINCIPLE 4:

### Academic administrators support and encourage quality practices in teaching and learning.

Academic leadership plays a pivotal role in encouraging quality practices that enhance teaching and learning. Quality institutions have high-quality leaders who encourage and support the teaching and learning activities on their campuses.

## Recommendations

### 1. Faculty are encouraged to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The scholarship of teaching and learning is gaining increased credibility as a legitimate form of scholarly activity on many college and university campuses. But inquiry into practices that support excellence in teaching and learning will be sustained only if these activities are supported by the academic administration. Scholarship and excellence in teaching and learning should be rewarded in ways that are appropriate for each campus. Regardless of an institution's mission, some amount of high-quality research on topics that promote teaching and learning should be recognized as scholarly contributions.

### 2. Teaching assignments take into account the needs of each campus, but institutions should assign courses to faculty members who are academically prepared to teach these courses.

Everyone loses when faculty are inadequately prepared for the courses they teach. If there is a need for faculty to teach in subject areas that they are not prepared to teach, they should be given time and support to gain the necessary knowledge. Support may include, for example, paying for an advanced (or basic) class in the needed content area, sending faculty to conferences where they can learn about the needed area, and arranging mentoring with someone who has the necessary expertise.

### 3. Psychology departments receive adequate support for their laboratories and laboratory-based classes.

As teachers of a scientific discipline, psychologists need space and equipment for data collection and analysis, and students need laboratory courses that teach these skills. Adequate investments in laboratory space and equipment as well as

routine upgrading of equipment, computers, and software are essential for a quality undergraduate education. Providing appropriate laboratory space and equipment for student learning and faculty research is a tangible commitment to the teaching and learning of psychological science.

#### **4. Academic administrators encourage faculty to engage in lifelong learning to stay current in their field.**

The knowledge base of psychology is constantly changing, and new technologies are used in teaching and research. New methods of data collection and analysis are changing the nature of psychology. Academic administrators should support the learning activities of faculty by funding advanced course work and attendance at symposia, conferences, and other places where faculty can stay abreast of the rapid changes in their field (e.g., emerging technologies, changes in our understanding of mental disorders, and developments in telehealth and integrated health care on the cutting edge of our field). In many instances, adjunct faculty teach for decades at the same institution, so administrators who care about the quality of instruction their students are receiving will extend some continuing education benefits to their long-term adjuncts as well as tenure-track faculty.

#### **5. Administrators support faculty experimentation to enhance teaching and learning, and they ensure that faculty are not punished if student evaluations are uneven.**

In general, learning will be improved when faculty try out different modes of instruction, with the goal of selecting appropriate modes that depend on the propensities of individual faculty (e.g., some may prefer to do mostly lecturing; others, mostly group work around problems they pose in class), the nature of the students in their classes, the types of classes, and the learning goals of faculty members and students. Faculty will use various modes of instruction only when there is a clear understanding that if student ratings of faculty effectiveness temporarily drop as a result of the experimentation (e.g., an attempt at cooperative learning does not work as well as expected), there will be no negative consequences for their promotion, tenure, or salary decisions. Faculty members should be free to experiment with different teaching and learning approaches without fear of reprisal. Teaching evaluations should be tailored to the different modes of instruction because students will have qualitatively different learning experiences in large lecture classes, laboratory classes, and seminars. For these reasons among others, student evaluations should not be used as the sole criterion for promotion and tenure. Moreover, student evaluations should include items representing all modes of instruction. Evidence of student learning, samples of student

work, syllabi, and evaluations by peer faculty are important sources of data when evaluating faculty members' teaching effectiveness.

**6. To encourage diverse points of view in college classrooms, administrators consider diversity issues in hiring and retention decisions.**

The quality of teaching and learning may be biased if diverse points of view are not represented in the classrooms of academic departments of psychology. A good way to create diversity of views in classrooms is to ensure that students learn from a diverse faculty. Thus, all aspects of diversity should be considered when making decisions about hiring and retaining faculty.

**7. Administrative support is essential to foster positive relationships among high schools, community colleges, four-year institutions, and graduate and professional schools.**

Students arrive on campus from a wide range of backgrounds. To ensure that they are prepared to learn, administrators should work cooperatively with “feeder schools” and with those programs that our students aspire to attend after graduation, including graduate and professional schools.



## QUALITY PRINCIPLE 5:

Policymakers and the general public understand why psychological literacy is necessary for informed citizens and an effective workforce.

Principles for quality in teaching and learning need support outside of academia. We need public policies and informed citizens to support improvement in undergraduate education.

## Recommendations

**1.** To affect change in the perceptions of the general public and policymakers, all psychologists develop and espouse the concept of psychologically literate citizens. They then convey this message so that policymakers and the general public will understand that being psychologically literate is similar to being able to read or use numbers in thinking.

Psychologically literate citizens have a well-defined vocabulary and basic knowledge of the critical subject matter of psychology. They value the intellectual challenges required to use scientific thinking and the disciplined analysis of information to evaluate alternative courses of action. They act ethically. They recognize and foster diversity. They are insightful and reflective about their own and others' behavior and mental processes. Psychologically literate citizens know how to cooperate and to help a group come to consensus, and they can discriminate between science and pseudoscience. They can apply their knowledge of psychological science to a broad range of situations, such as making educational decisions, assisting older adults with retirement planning, using appropriate disciplinary practices with their children, applying research findings to a problem, and using leadership skills in group settings. Literacy in psychology will help individuals, families, and larger groups in countless ways. The general public and policymakers need to understand and value what psychologists know and do. Psychology educators and their students have a responsibility to educate the media on the accurate depiction of psychological science and to encourage public policymakers to use findings from psychological research when forming policies.

**2. Psychologists call on the media for accurate depictions of psychological science and on policymakers to use psychologists' findings to inform public policies.**

For the most part, the general public, including policymakers, misunderstand psychology, thinking that it is a profession that helps emotionally disturbed people cope with their problems or that deals with the paranormal. These misunderstandings are not surprising given the widespread images of psychologists in the media, where they are very rarely shown as scientists and practitioners who apply psychological research. APA urges the media to more accurately depict the science of psychology and urges public policymakers to use psychologists' research findings when crafting public policies and deciding how to act in the public good.

## CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, these principles offer recommendations that will have positive and long-lasting effects on the millions of students worldwide who enroll in undergraduate psychology classes. They will advance psychology in ways “that benefit society and improve people’s lives” (APA, 2008). APA calls upon all of the stakeholders in undergraduate education—students, faculty, departments, academic administrators, public policymakers, and the general public—to adopt these principles for quality teaching and learning.

For additional information about these principles and related topics, please see the edited book *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline* (Halpern, 2010), which was produced in conjunction with these *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology*.

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AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

Precollege and Undergraduate Education  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
202-336-6140  
[Education@apa.org](mailto:Education@apa.org)