

PLO Assessment Template

Program: Psychology

Semester: Spring 2020

PLO 1: Understand the major theoretical perspectives in psychology and analyze the implications of these theories.

Method of assessment: Research Paper

Criteria: Students in the program will achieve an average of 70%

Results

Quantitative (*Average of success rate*):

82% of students met or exceeded the criterion of 70%.

Qualitative (*Examples of guiding questions below*):

In what areas were students most successful?

- Students were particularly successful in their ability to:
 - Summarizing past research that is relevant to their own research hypotheses.
 - Draw upon relevant theories to support their research hypotheses.
 - Reference seminal authors who wrote or contributed to major theories in psychology.
 - Apply those theories to form their own hypotheses.

What issues and needs were revealed?

- Students appear to have difficulty integrating and synthesizing multiple theories. They are good at drawing on one primary theory, but they do not readily integrate more than one. For example, they have difficulty identifying how theories relate to one another, difficulty comparing and contrasting theories, and difficulty offering alternative hypotheses implied by various theories.
- Students have difficulty crafting adequate transitions between different studies or theoretical perspectives, suggesting they have difficulty outlining a cohesive argument.
- Students also have difficulty situating their work in terms of past research; they do not readily discuss the extent to which their research is consistent or inconsistent with past research and theory.

What was surprising about the findings/results?

- We experienced some surprise about students' failure to implement feedback on the paper – students would make one suggested edit, then fail to implement those same edits elsewhere in the paper.
- We were also somewhat surprised about how narrowly they thought about relevant theories when applying them to their paper – they had difficulty
- One pleasant surprise was that, given the transition to online teaching this semester due to Covid-19, students took a high degree of independent initiative when working on this research project. There is a lot more dialogue and visits in office hours during a typical semester, but students were less engaged with faculty yet produced pretty high-quality work.

Would a different assessment/tracking method be more appropriate?

- It might make good sense to have a specific assignment that encourages students to think critically about big picture ideas and theories in psychology. This type of assignment might also help remind students of theories that they can then use to inform their research hypotheses.
- Since this PLO focuses on broader theoretical knowledge, perhaps a better assessment would be to include data from other classes that build on General Psychology (e.g., Human Development, Social Psychology, Psych of Adjustment, Theories of Personality).
- Perhaps a different assessment could come in the form of implementing a “theory” paper, in addition to a research project. This type of paper would encourage students to synthesize multiple theories and be better prepared to situate hypotheses and data in terms of those theories.

Do subpopulations of students perform differently on the assessments?

- Subgroups of students would differ in their performance somewhat as a function of the group they were in – this research paper is conducted in a group project format, and it was clear that some students were aided by their group members.
- There also appears to be a difference, although perhaps a small to negligible difference, in ability to synthesize theory depending on whether the student is a Psychology major or not. Most students are Psychology majors and have continued engaging with major theories in Psychology before they arrive to Psyc 220, but students coming from other majors have a bit more difficulty remembering relevant theories and using them to inform their hypotheses for the research project.

Planned Action:

Does the program outcome language need to be refined? If so, how?

- The program outcome language is clear, no changes recommended.

What professional development opportunities would help support success?

- The department could meet to discuss the ways that the faculty could be more consistent with one another in the nature of the assessments being done. This would help us ensure that we are properly measuring these PLOs, consistently, across faculty and across different classes offered in the department.

What additional resources are needed (equipment/supplies/space/budget) to implement improvements?

- For this PLO, we cannot think of any additional resources needed at this time.