



**Society for the Teaching of Psychology (APA Division 2)**  
**OFFICE OF TEACHING RESOURCES IN PSYCHOLOGY (OTRP)**  
Department of Psychology, Georgia Southern University, P. O. Box 8041, Statesboro, GA 30460-8041

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A MEETING OF CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY\***

Mary J. Allen, Richard Noel, and Jess Deegan, California State University, Bakersfield; Diane Halpern and Cynthia Crawford, California State University, San Bernardino (2000)

### **Overview**

This seven-page resource consists of a set of eight goals and objectives for the undergraduate psychology major. The goals are divided into two major categories: (1) knowledge, skills, and values unique to psychology and (2) knowledge, skills, and values for undergraduates further developed in psychology. The document is adapted from a report drafted by 48 psychology faculty representing the 19 campuses of California State University. This resource can be downloaded from [OTRP-Online](#) or purchased in print form from OTRP.

### **Outline of Contents**

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### **Introduction**

Department-based learning outcomes can provide a framework for individual departments for curriculum and program planning, assessment, and faculty recruitment. Once program faculty have agreed upon learning objectives, they can examine and plan their curriculum to ensure that learning objectives will be fostered. They can tailor assessment processes to explicitly examine the mastery of objectives by their students and recruit faculty who will help the department attain their goals. In shaping this document we were mindful of concerns about the potential misuse of data gathered for outcomes assessment, such as administrative use of outcomes data for summative evaluation and resource allocation. We viewed outcomes assessment as a formative, rather than a summative process.

The goals and outcomes specified in this document are descriptive, not prescriptive. Departments are not expected to endorse every element of this list because campus missions, faculty perspectives, and student interests and needs vary across campuses. Each campus and department has the prerogative and responsibility to develop its own learning objectives, and operationalization of some of these outcomes should be in relation to local General Education objectives. Because campuses reflect unique histories and respond to unique service regions, psychology majors across campuses are not necessarily

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\* This document is adapted from a report drafted by 48 California State University (CSU) psychology faculty representing 19 CSU campuses (see the Appendix). Our meeting was supported by a 1999 grant from the California State University Office of Academic Services and Professional Development and was hosted at California State University, Bakersfield.

interchangeable. Specific learning outcomes and relative emphases will vary across campuses. We believe it is healthy for departments to have differing goals and objectives, so students can seek learning environments that match their interests and needs.

We propose eight goals and related objectives grouped into two major categories: (1) Knowledge, Skills, and Values Unique to Psychology and (2) Knowledge, Skills, and Values for Undergraduates Further Developed in Psychology. Individual departments are welcome to consider this list when examining their own goals and objectives. If they choose to do this, they are encouraged to borrow and to adapt any elements of the list that are relevant to their mission and to determine when and how to assess them.

## **Knowledge, Skills, and Values Unique to Psychology**

### **Goal 1. Theory and Content of Psychology**

Students should be familiar with the major theoretical approaches, findings, and historical trends in psychology.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Explain and distinguish among the major theoretical approaches in at least three of these areas of psychology: biological, psychoanalytic, cognitive, behavioral, humanistic, social, and developmental.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of psychology in relation to
  - a. natural sciences (e.g., biology, ethology, neuroscience)
  - b. social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology)
  - c. applied disciplines (e.g., criminal justice, business, law, social work)
3. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of
  - a. theory and research in learning, perception, and cognition
  - b. theory and research in personality and social processes
  - c. theory and research in the biological and physiological bases of behavior
  - d. theory and research on developmental changes in human thought and behavior
  - e. the history of psychology: the evolution of methods of psychology and its theoretical conflicts
  - f. individual differences in behavior, including those related to gender, ethnicity, and culture
  - g. psychological tests and measurements and the ways that test information is used in our society
  - h. perspectives on the origin and treatment of abnormal behavior
  - i. at least one applied area of psychology, such as clinical, industrial/organizational, or health psychology
  - j. the contribution of animal research to our understanding of human behavior
4. Evaluate the scientific approach as a tool for understanding human thought and behavior.

### **Goal 2. Methodology**

Students should understand and be able to use major research methods in psychology, including design, data analysis, and interpretation.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Locate relevant research, theory, and information necessary to plan, conduct, and interpret results of research studies.

2. Formulate a testable research hypothesis.
3. Design basic studies to address psychological questions using different research methodologies.
4. Under appropriate supervision, collect, analyze, and report data designed to answer a psychological question.
5. Apply APA ethical guidelines in the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of
6. psychological research. Demonstrate understanding of APA guidelines for the ethical treatment of human and nonhuman research participants.
7. Apply and interpret basic descriptive and inferential statistics. Demonstrate understanding of the appropriate use of various data analytic techniques for addressing different types of questions and hypotheses.
8. Demonstrate knowledge of different research methodologies employed by psychologists, including an understanding of the appropriate use of various research designs for addressing different types of questions and hypotheses.
9. Place research questions in an appropriate theoretical context.
10. Evaluate the appropriateness of conclusions presented in disseminated research relevant to psychology.

### **Goal 3. Application of Psychology**

Students should have an understanding of applications of psychology to personal, social, and organizational issues.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Identify the major applied areas of psychology.
2. Describe the role of psychology in addressing human problems, both individually and collectively.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of how the study of psychology enables individuals to make informed judgements that strengthen the community and build public policy.
4. Explain behavior using different psychological theories or models.
5. Formulate how major principles of psychology can be applied to career choices.
6. Construct examples of how psychological theories and principles relate to everyday life.
7. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own field experiences.
8. Analyze alternative solutions to problems or issues encountered in real-world settings.
9. Design an action plan for improving a circumstance for an individual or group. This involves:
  - a. Knowledge. Define a problem in need of change.
  - b. Comprehension. Describe what needs to be changed.
  - c. Application. Apply psychological theories and principles to the specified problem.

- d. Analysis. Compare and contrast different perspectives for the solution of the problem.
- e. Synthesis. Design and formulate an ethical plan of action.
- f. Evaluation. Assess the effectiveness of the plan and solution(s) employed.

10. Treat individuals in applied settings according to the APA ethical guidelines.

11. Recognize unethical application of psychological principles.

**In addition, students should:**

1. Recognize the value of psychology in understanding and suggesting solutions for real-world problems.
2. Appreciate the value of psychological science in society.

## **Knowledge, Skills, and Values for Undergraduates Further Developed in Psychology**

### **Goal 4. Information Competence, Technology, and Computers**

Students should demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for multiple purposes.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Demonstrate these minimum skills: using a personal computer, making and transferring files, avoiding viruses, using basic word processing programs, using and accessing email, and browsing the Web.
2. Demonstrate information competence at each stage in the following process:
  - a. Formulating a topic. Choosing a topic and restating it in narrower and broader terms.
  - b. Determining the types of information needed. Identifying sources of information from multiple media and describing their relationship to the chosen topic.
  - c. Locating appropriate sources by searching electronic and traditional databases and providing evidence of the search.
  - d. Gathering appropriate sources from multiple media and retrieving information from distant and local sources.
  - e. Differentiating between primary vs. secondary sources, empirical vs. non-empirical sources, and peer-reviewed vs. professional vs. other sources for multiple media.
  - f. Evaluating the quality and appropriateness of the identified sources regardless of the media, including evaluating its value and accuracy.
3. Organize and report information by using appropriate software to produce understandable reports of the psychological literature, methodology, and statistical analyses in APA or other appropriate style, including graphical representations of data.
4. Use information and technology ethically and responsibly, including
  - a. Giving examples of and identifying examples of plagiarism.
  - b. Discussing why plagiarism is unethical.
  - c. Using citations correctly for a variety of media sources.
  - d. Knowing the limitations of statistical techniques and data collection methods.
  - e. Knowing the limitations of one's own understanding of the literature, statistics, and methodology.

5. Use technology to communicate with others in the field, including using email and creating Web pages.

### **Goal 5. Critical Thinking, Logic, and Problem-Solving**

Students should use and respect skeptical inquiry, critical thinking, and the scientific approach to understanding behavior.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Demonstrate critical thinking skills and abilities acquired through training and experience in scientific methodology, including the ability to
  - a. Identify, describe, and compare major scientific methods for gathering and analyzing information and for explaining behavior.
  - b. Use knowledge of research design to justify and challenge research conclusions.
  - c. Support conclusions with reasoning and evidence.
2. Evaluate the merit of information, including the ability to
  - a. Differentiate fact from fiction.
  - b. Differentiate the probable from the improbable.
  - c. Recognize and evaluate the source and context of information.
  - d. Identify and explain inappropriate assertions.
3. Approach problems effectively, including the ability to
  - a. Articulate problems clearly.
  - b. Generate multiple solutions to problems.
  - c. Recognize and defend against common thinking fallacies.

### **Goal 6. Cultural Awareness**

Students should have an understanding of the complexity of cultural diversity.

#### **Outcomes**

##### **Students should be able to:**

1. Work and communicate effectively and sensitively with people from a diverse range of backgrounds and varying demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race, disability, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religion, cognitive abilities).
2. Examine the major cultural components which have influenced their own identity.
3. Demonstrate understanding of how their own identity influences their beliefs, values, and interactions with others.
4. Demonstrate understanding of the impact and issues of power, privilege, and oppression and their relationship to prejudice, discrimination, and inequity.
5. Examine and challenge their own prejudicial attitudes.

### **Goal 7. Communication Skills**

Students should be able to express themselves effectively in written and oral communication.

## **Outcomes**

### **Students should be able to:**

1. Demonstrate effective writing skills in multiple formats (e.g., essays, graphs and tables, correspondence, technical papers, and note taking) and for multiple purposes (e.g., defending, explaining, persuading, arguing, teaching).
2. Demonstrate effective oral communication skills in multiple formats (e.g., group discussion, debate, lecture) and for multiple purposes (e.g., defending, explaining, persuading, arguing, teaching).

## **Goal 8. Personal Development**

Students should understand themselves and others in a cultural context and develop interpersonal skills for diverse settings over the lifespan.

## **Outcomes**

### **Students should be able to:**

1. Identify their own values.
2. Demonstrate self-awareness of their own feelings, emotions, motives, and attitudes.
3. Use psychological theory to provide insight and understanding of their own behavior.
4. Demonstrate the ability to reflect on experience and find meaning in it.
5. Use psychological theory to understand interpersonal and group behavior.
6. Identify the impact of their own behavior on others.
7. Demonstrate appropriate, effective relationships with others in diverse settings, such as work, family, and social settings.
8. Develop knowledge-based interpersonal skills that foster sensitivity and expand self-knowledge.
9. Demonstrate interpersonal awareness and sensitivity to differences and similarities in the way people are treated due to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, and sexual orientation.
10. Demonstrate communication skills, such as interviewing, active listening, and empathic listening.
11. Demonstrate group facilitation and interaction skills.
12. Demonstrate conflict resolution skills.
13. Define career paths and develop skills relevant to pursuing them.
14. Demonstrate understanding of the importance of life-long learning and maintaining currency in one's field.

## Appendix

### Psychology Faculty Who Contributed to this Document

Mary Allen, California State University, Bakersfield, mallen@csb.edu  
Rachel August, California State University, Sacramento, raugust@saclink.csus.edu  
Steve Bacon, California State University, Bakersfield, sbacon@csb.edu  
Lori Barker-Hackett, California Polytechnic University, Pomona, labarker@csupomona.edu  
Kay Bathurst, California State University, Fullerton, Kbathurst@fullerton.edu  
Lisa Bohon, California State University, Sacramento, bohonim@saclink.csus.edu  
Tammy Bourg, California State University, Sacramento, bourgt@csus.edu  
Robert Christenson, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, rachrist@calpoly.edu.  
Keith Colman, California State University, Long Beach, krcolman@csulb.edu  
Caran Colvin, San Francisco State University, ccolvin@sfsu.edu  
Robert Cooper, San Jose State University, rocooper@email.sjsu.edu  
Chris Cozby, California State University, Fullerton, Cozby@fullerton.edu  
Cynthia Crawford, California State University, San Bernardino, ccrawfor@csusb.edu  
Jess Deegan, California State University, Bakersfield, jdeegan@csb.edu  
Stuart Fischeff, California State University, Los Angeles, sfischo@calstatela.edu  
Susan Frances, Humboldt State University, sjf2@axe.humboldt.edu  
Diane Halpern, California State University, San Bernardino, dhalpern@csusb.edu  
Sharon Hamill, California State University, San Marcos, shamill@mailhost1.csusm.edu  
Diane Harris, San Francisco State University, dharris@sfsu.edu  
Nancy Harrison, California State University, Hayward, nharrison@csuhayward.edu  
Lawrence Herringer, California State University, Chico, lherringer@csuchico.edu  
Susan Hillier, Sonoma State University, susan.hillier@sonoma.edu  
Megumi Hosoda, San Jose State University, mhosoda@email.sjsu.edu  
Senqi Hu, Humboldt State University, sh4@axe.humboldt.edu  
Lumei Hui, Humboldt State University, lh6@axe.humboldt.edu  
Robert Kapche, California State University, Long Beach, rkapche@csulb.edu  
John Kim, San Francisco State University, johnkim@sfsu.edu  
Jan Kottke, California State University, San Bernardino, jkottke@csusb.edu  
Eleanor Levine, California State University, Hayward, elevine@csuhayward.edu  
Brennis Lucero-Wagoner, California State University, Northridge, blucero-wagoner@csun.edu  
Laurel McCabe, Sonoma State University, laurel.mccabe@sonoma.edu  
Jeffery Mio, California Polytechnic University, Pomona, jsmio@csupomona.edu  
Elizabeth Nelson, California State University, Stanislaus, elnelson@toto.csustan.edu  
Linden Nelson, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, lnelson@calpoly.edu  
Richard Noel, California State University, Bakersfield, rnoel@csb.edu  
Sandra Pacheco, California State University, Monterey Bay, sandra\_pacheco@monterey.edu  
Beth Rienzi, California State University, Bakersfield, brienzi@csb.edu  
Jean Ritter, California State University, Fresno, jean\_ritter@csufresno.edu  
Wes Schultz, California State University, San Marcos, psch@mailhost1.csusm.edu  
Susan Siaw, California Polytechnic University, Pomona, snsiaaw@csupomona.edu  
Paul Spear, California State University, Chico, pspear@csuchico.edu  
Sheila Grant Thompson, California State University, Northridge, sgrant@csun.edu  
Debra Valencia-Laver, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, dlvalenc@calpoly.edu  
Eddie Vela, California State University, Chico, evela@csuchico.edu  
Michael Wapner, California State University, Los Angeles, mwapner@calstatela.edu  
Art Warmoth, Sonoma State University, art.warmoth@sonoma.edu  
Marilyn Wilson, California State University, Fresno, marilyn\_wilson@csufresno.edu