
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION IN PSYCHOLOGY

A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline

Edited by Diane F. Halpern
What is being taught and learned in the undergraduate psychology curriculum? Debate regarding the undergraduate psychology curriculum is dynamic and longstanding (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Buxton et al., 1952; Kulik, Brown, Vestewig, & Wright, 1973; McKeechie & Milholland, 1961; Scheirer & Rogers, 1985; see also, McGovern, 1992). The most recent curricular review (Brewer et al., 1993) was part of the American Psychological Association's (APA's) National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology, which convened at St. Mary's College of Maryland in 1991 and sought to integrate current scholarship on the teaching and learning of psychology (see McGovern, 1993). In a report on the curriculum, Brewer et al. (1993) reaffirmed the conception of psychology as a liberal arts discipline, noting the synergy existing between psychology

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courses and those in other liberal arts disciplines (see also McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991). Furthermore, the Brewer report proposed a framework for the psychology major identifying four groups of courses, preferably to be taken in the following order: the introductory course; methodology courses, including research methods, statistics, and psychometrics; content courses, including those that address natural and social science features of the discipline; and integrative experiences that include internships, research projects, or a capstone course. Although not a prescription for the psychology curriculum, the framework proposed by Brewer et al. (1993) was intended as a guiding structure to highlight the common features of all psychology programs as well as to maximize opportunities for students to acquire and develop the skills and abilities important for all psychology majors.

Subsequent data indicate that important components of Brewer et al.'s (1993) recommendations have not been widely implemented (Messer, Griggs, & Jackson, 1999; Perlman & McCann, 1999a, 1999b; Stoloff et al., 2008; Stoloff, Sanders, & McCarthy, n.d.). At the same time, there has been a proliferation of narrowly defined course offerings that reflect the growing specialization within the discipline. Although specialization reflects progress and confers many benefits on the field, fragmentation of the discipline may be problematic if unifying elements of the discipline are obscured. Moreover, developments have emerged outside of psychology that further blur the discipline’s boundaries (McGovern & Brewer, 2003). Together, these forces provide great impetus for a reevaluation of the undergraduate psychology curriculum.

In this chapter, we discuss the need for curricular reform, advocate a curricular model that affirms basic past assumptions and integrates recent scholarship, and make concrete curricular recommendations for faculty and administrators of undergraduate psychology departments. We wish to make our intentions clear by defining our use of the term core at the outset of the chapter. The word core means the central or the most important part of the curriculum. Core courses are typically required of all students who major in psychology. In addition, we believe that psychology programs should structure their curricula to allow psychology majors to take elective courses that suit their own interests or career aspirations.

WHY CURRICULAR REFORM NOW?

Various factors within and outside the discipline create the need to reassess the undergraduate psychology curriculum. These factors raise concerns about the lack of coherence of the current curriculum and the integrity of the discipline’s identity.
Contextual Factors Operating Within Psychology

The science of psychology has expanded both rapidly and broadly in recent years. This remarkable growth has been accompanied by educational pressures in the form of academic specialization and fragmentation, and rising interest in applied psychology.

Increasing Specialization and the Resulting Fragmentation

Remarkable developments within psychology have led to insights that would have been hard to imagine just a few years ago. They have led, for example, to the emergence of new and different areas of specialization (e.g., positive psychology) as well as separate, stand-alone departments (e.g., neuroscience) distinct from traditional psychology departments. This trend is evidenced in numerous other ways. During the last 2 decades there has been an increase in the number of specialty conferences focusing on research within narrowly defined domains (e.g., Society for Research in Child Development, Society for Neuroscience, Society for Personality and Social Psychology). In addition, there are now 54 distinct divisions within the APA; 7 new ones were added since 1990 (and a brief moratorium in the 1990s did little to stem the tide of division propagation). The present undergraduate curriculum reflects this proliferation of specialty areas. For example, Stoloff et al. (n.d.) identified 40 different undergraduate psychology courses being offered at colleges and universities. Typical major requirements range from 7 to 10 courses—or slightly less than one third of all courses students complete during their baccalaureate education (Stoloff et al., 2008). Such variety is not necessarily problematic. Increasing specialization reflects advancements in the field, promotes the expansion of knowledge within these narrowly defined areas, and often provides context for interdisciplinary activity. These are all important positive outcomes.

One risk associated with a proliferation of specialized areas, however, is fragmentation of the discipline. These specialized areas may become isolated entities that are not recognizable as domains of the same discipline or that cannot communicate meaningfully with one another. If psychology's undergraduate curriculum reflects this fragmentation, imparting to students a view of the discipline as a unified whole becomes more challenging (Solomon, Kavangaugh, Goethals, & Crider, 1982).

Indeed, the idea of a broad-based general perspective on the discipline seems to be waning in popularity. For example, organizations that focus on general psychology are struggling to remain viable. In recent years, the regional psychological associations have generally experienced a decline in attendance at their annual meetings (Packard, 2007). Consider, too, what has happened to the single APA division that does not serve a specialty area—APA Division 1 (General Psychology). In 1982, this division boasted
a membership of 5,098; by 2006, that figure had dropped to 1,826 (APA, 2007b). This 64% decline contrasts with an increase of nearly 17% in APA's total membership during the same period (APA, 2007b). Of course, some of Division 1's membership decline may reflect shifts into new divisions as they have appeared; nevertheless, APA members may belong to more than one division, and the main message here is that it seems clear that psychologists are becoming less and less likely to identify themselves as generalists.

The undergraduate psychology curriculum also reflects this trend. A systematic review of 500 undergraduate psychology programs reveals that a substantial number do not require courses representing the disciplines' basic content domains: 40% require research methods, 21% physiological psychology, 19% developmental psychology, 17% social psychology, and 9% cognitive psychology (Perlman & McCann, 1999b). A more recent review of 374 programs (Stoloff et al., 2008) essentially duplicates these earlier findings. However, using a broader coding scheme for research-methods-type courses (i.e., research methods, statistics, integrated methods and statistics, experimental psychology, psychological testing, advanced statistics, and computer applications), Stoloff et al. found that 98% of the programs in their sample required such a course. More generally, these researchers observed that although

virtually every student majoring in psychology is required to take an introductory course and one or more statistics and/or research methods courses... fewer than half of the programs require a course in developmental, physiological, abnormal, or social psychology. Approximately one third of the programs require a course in personality, history and systems, or cognitive psychology. These courses represent the core content of the psychology major program. No other courses or content areas are required by more than a quarter of the institutions we sampled. (Stoloff et al., 2008, p. 22).

Stoloff et al. also noted a decline in a required capstone experience among their programs (from 63% of programs reported by Perlman & McCann, 1999b, to 40%). A broad-based perspective on the field depends on exposure to each of the core content areas mentioned previously, but fewer than half of programs require courses in these areas. We do not oppose course offerings in specialty topics (e.g., forensic psychology, human sexuality), but we stress that they should not replace students' exposure to the core content areas of the field.

Increasing Popularity of Applied Psychology

An analysis by the APA's Committee on Employment and Human Resources (Howard et al., 1986) revealed that beginning in the early 1970s the number of psychology PhDs granted in health service provider subfields (e.g., clinical, counseling, school psychology) dramatically outpaced those
in traditional research and academic domains (e.g., experimental, physiological, developmental psychology). Moreover, traditional subfields experienced a decline in doctoral production. For example, between 1972 and 1984, the number of new PhDs in experimental, comparative, and physiological psychology decreased at an average of 5.1% per year. In contrast, during that same time period the number of new PhDs in clinical, counseling, and school psychology increased annually at an average of 5.5%. These data do not include the PsyD degree in psychology, whose inclusion would surely amplify these discrepancies. Furthermore, the emergence of the professional school movement attests to the enormous growth of professional psychology over the past 3 decades (Benjamin & Baker, 2004).

It seems reasonable to speculate that trends in doctoral production reflect and motivate changes in the undergraduate psychology curriculum. Although no current data regarding undergraduate psychology majors’ interests exist, anecdotal evidence suggests that many students entering college aspire to become health service providers. Anecdotal evidence further suggests that students conceive of psychology as a helping profession rather than a laboratory science. Thus, students’ narrow conception of the field may lead them to be disinclined to explore more traditional subfields within the discipline. It seems likely that student interest in applied areas increases the demand for relevant course offerings and that a preponderance of such courses may result in a diminishing interest in traditional experimental work. To be sure, we are not suggesting that burgeoning interest in applied psychology is a negative trend or that undergraduates’ pursuit of courses in applied psychology is problematic. Rather, we emphasize that applied and traditional experimental subfields compose a unitary discipline and that, vocational aspirations notwithstanding, all psychology majors should be grounded in the essential components of the field.

Some Factors Outside the Discipline

The discipline of psychology has not evolved in isolation. A variety of socioeconomic, educational, and technological trends have influenced curricular decisions and directions.

The Rise of a Consumer-Driven Culture and Higher Education

Perhaps now more than ever, higher education is affected by economic concerns and motivations. Many students and parents view education in vocational rather than academic terms. They consider learning as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Along with rising college costs, this consumer-driven orientation may help to explain some current trends in higher education.

It is not unusual for students to be simultaneously enrolled in more than one institution, a phenomenon referred to as “swirling” (Bordon, 2004).
It is also not uncommon for students to take courses at one institution while maintaining their primary enrollment status at another. In fact, 59% of students completing their bachelor’s degree from 1999 to 2000 attended more than one institution (Peter & Forrest Cataldi, 2005; see also, chap. 5, this volume). These market-driven trends bear relevance to the undergraduate psychology curriculum because curricula differ across institutions in different ways. To be sure, we expect curricular differences owing to variations in faculty, resources, and student populations. These differences may become problematic, however, when they involve the essential components of our discipline. In this regard, swirling may render it more difficult for students to obtain a broad and integrated understanding of the field.

Another relevant trend relates to transfer students. Many of them take a large number of psychology courses at a 2-year institution before ultimately completing their baccalaureate in psychology at a 4-year college or university. At present, 46% of undergraduates in the United States are enrolled in 2-year colleges (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2008a); half of all students who complete a baccalaureate degree attend a community college in the course of their studies (AACC, 2008b). Regardless of institution type, transferring psychology courses from one school to another can be complicated because psychology curricula differ markedly from one another. Indeed, not all courses are transferable, and students are often required to retake a course at their new institution. The phenomena of transferring and swirling may be rendered less problematic to the extent that all psychology curricula ensure students’ broad-based exposure to the discipline’s core.

The Accountability Movement in Higher Education

The issue of accountability is relevant, albeit indirectly, to curricular reform (e.g., P. L. Maki, 2001, 2004; O’Neil, 1992; Schneider & Schoenberg, 1998). The increasing cost of higher education has prompted various constituencies (e.g., regional accreditation bodies, state legislatures) to demand the empirical demonstration of quality education at all varieties of undergraduate institutions. Psychology has addressed these demands by assessing teaching and learning outcomes (e.g., APA Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies, 2002a; Dunn, Mehrotra, & Halonen, 2004; see also chap. 9, this volume). The accountability movement helps to ensure that undergraduate programs are relevant, coherent, and of high quality. In this vein, we recommend continued assessment of curricula, particularly as they relate to learning outcomes.

The Technological Revolution

The emergence of the Internet has irreversibly transformed higher education, largely through the unprecedented amount of information it makes available. Furthermore, this flood of information has the potential to shape
students' conceptions of the field of psychology because it can amplify the
historic discrepancy between psychology's public image and its true nature
(Benjamin, 1986). New and emerging technologies are affecting the dynam-
is of the classroom and even impinging on the need for the traditional class-
room (see chap. 7, this volume). These changes highlight the importance of
making deliberate choices about the psychological content that is conveyed
to students and the form this message will take (see chaps. 6 and 7, this
volume, regarding the form).

Resolution: Curricular Reform Is Needed

Improving the psychology curriculum is an established tradition, as is
reflecting on the broader educational experience students receive when they
major in psychology (see chap. 1, this volume). A confluence of factors within
and outside the discipline necessitates curricular reform. Accordingly, our
recommendations in this chapter concern the appropriate scope and content
of the undergraduate curriculum and the specific skills that psychology ma-
jors should acquire.

WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT AND LEARNED IN THE
UNDERGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM?

Internal and external pressures on the discipline since the St. Mary's
conference suggest a need for a common, coherent core curriculum for the
undergraduate psychology major. At the same time, previous curricular work
implies a lack of agreement among undergraduate psychology faculty con-
cerning what constitutes a core curriculum for the major beyond courses in
introductory psychology, scientific research methods, and statistics (Brewer
et al., 1993). The need for a comprehensive core of content in psychology is
clearly addressed, however, in two recent documents: an article advocating
the use of quality benchmarks in undergraduate psychology programs (Dunn,
McCarthy, Baker, Halomen, & Hill, 2007) and the APA Guidelines for the
Undergraduate Psychology Major (APA, 2007a). Dunn et al. proposed quality
benchmarks—criteria designed to assess performance in key domains (e.g.,
curriculum, student learning outcomes and development)—to advance aca-
demic program reviews by helping psychology departments define their mis-
sions and objectives and to document their effectiveness. Using benchmarks
enables programs to identify their distinctive and successful qualities as well
as areas in need of improvement or further development. As Dunn and col-
leagues noted, “when interpreted in light of an institution’s mission and cul-
ture, [benchmarks] can assist program personnel in optimizing experiences
for students” (p. 653).

In their discussion of benchmarks for the curricular domain in quality
undergraduate programs, Dunn et al. (2007) called for a science-based cur-
riculum (see also Halonen et al., 2003); a curricular structure specifying core requirements and course sequencing (see also APA, 2002a); a balanced, broad curriculum; and disciplinary breadth. Dunn et al. also recommended infusing training in ethics and cultural diversity at all levels in the curriculum, and they suggested community service learning as a vehicle for integration of student knowledge.

The APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major grew out of the work of the American Psychological Association Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) Task Force on Psychology Major Competencies (APA, 2007a). The BEA task force built on earlier undergraduate curricular work (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Buxton et al., 1952; Kulik et al., 1973; McKeachie & Milholland, 1961; Scheirer & Rogers, 1985) and also provided an extensive feedback and review process not seen in previous undergraduate curricular work. The final BEA task force report, the Undergraduate Psychology Major Learning Goals and Outcomes (APA Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies, 2002a, 2002b) was widely distributed to a variety of institutions and relevant organizations representing precollege, undergraduate, and graduate education in psychology as well as to representative professional organizations with an interest in the undergraduate psychology curriculum. This feedback was incorporated into the final version of the Learning Goals and Outcomes endorsed by the BEA in March 2002. In July 2002, the Learning Goals and Outcomes report was disseminated to APA governance groups and divisions in preparation for approval as an APA policy guideline. Later revisions were adopted as the APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major by the APA Board of Directors and the APA Council of Representatives in August 2006 (APA, 2007a).

The APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major establish 10 recommended outcome goals for the undergraduate psychology major (APA, 2007a). Specific learning outcomes are further identified for each of the 10 goals, delineating competencies expected of students with baccalaureate degrees in psychology (see also chap. 9, this volume). The guidelines do not cover or prescribe specific courses but highlight general outcomes for the major including the following: knowledge of the breadth of psychology, research methods, critical thinking skills, applications, values, information literacy, communication skills, sociocultural awareness, personal development, and career planning. In addition to reaffirming the work that began at St. Mary's, which places scientific methodology at the center of the undergraduate psychology curriculum, the guidelines identify four general content domains in which the undergraduate psychology major should demonstrate knowledge and understanding. These major content areas represent the breadth and depth of the discipline and include biological bases of behavior and mental processes, learning and cognition, developmental changes across the life span, and sociocultural (identified in previous guidelines as individual differences). Knowledge of the history of psychology, "including the evolu-
tion of methods in psychology, its theoretical conflicts, and its sociocultural conflicts" is also identified as an outcome (APA, 2007a, p.12).

Our recommendations for the future teaching of psychology draw on the guidelines (APA, 2007a) and the work of Dunn et al. (2007) on quality benchmarks for undergraduate psychology programs. Both our recommendations and our perspective are consistent with the emphasis on psychological literacy and the global convergences in defining undergraduate learning outcomes described by the authors of chapter 1. In looking to the future of teaching and learning in the undergraduate psychology curriculum, we strongly affirm the continuing place of psychology as a science in the context of the liberal arts and sciences curriculum. In addition to its role as an important liberal arts discipline and as preparation for graduate study in the field, psychology will also continue to play an important role as a “hub” science (e.g., Cacioppo, 2007), serving students from related disciplines in education and the medical and social sciences. These recommendations illustrate the complementary relationship of the guidelines and the benchmarks in a quality undergraduate curriculum and in determining desired outcomes at the level of teaching and student behavior. In addition, we indicate typical areas of coursework that may help to achieve these outcomes.

Recommended Core Curriculum

The proposed curriculum emphasizes course content and learning outcomes rather than specific courses. It assumes that all students complete introductory psychology before taking other courses in the discipline. Figure 3.1, which relies on concentric circles for heuristic reasons, represents the proposed core curriculum. As depicted in its center, we recommend that all programs require psychology majors to take courses in scientific methods—research methods and statistics—because this material is central to the discipline. We further advise that methodology courses be taken soon after completing the introductory psychology course. The rationale for this recommendation is simple: Success in undergraduate psychology courses often requires competence in research design as well as data analysis and interpretation—the primary learning objectives of methodology courses. Moreover, without familiarity with the basics of scientific methodology, students’ appreciation of all later course material in the major is seriously limited. Acquiring these skills early is beneficial to students, who are then prepared for more sophisticated work in the discipline.

As represented in Figure 3.1, further recommendations correspond to succeeding concentric circles, starting with the second one from the center. Note that outer circles depend on the knowledge and skills derived from the circles found within them. We emphasize that issues of diversity and ethics should be well integrated into the contents of all courses in each of these domains. Students should complete at least one course in each of four spe-
cific domains: biological bases, developmental, learning and cognition, and sociocultural approaches. Undergraduate programs should indicate specific learning goals within each of these areas. Programs should ensure that students have opportunities for the application of acquired knowledge and skills. Such experiences enable students to appreciate the discipline’s practical uses and may serve to expand their knowledge base and strengthen relevant skills. Students may also learn about the application of psychology through relevant courses. Finally, we recommend that all psychology majors participate in a capstone experience, in which they are encouraged to integrate disparate components represented in their knowledge base. Ideally, this culminating educational experience will involve a considerable amount of course content and a wide range of skills related to the discipline.

The following section presents recommended core curriculum content and outcomes for the psychology program and individual students as well as examples of typical courses or experiences that may help to produce the de-
sired outcomes. As already noted, Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationships among these areas, beginning with scientific methods, issues of ethics and diversity, essential content domains, application, and an integrative capstone experience.

1. Scientific Methods

Students majoring in psychology should be well versed in scientific methodology, including descriptive and inferential statistics and research methods. Different approaches for covering these fundamental areas are possible. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be taught.

Program Goal. Teach the skills and behaviors of scientists.

Student Outcome. Identify and explain the scientific foundations of psychology, use and evaluate scientific evidence for psychological claims.

Typical Courses. Research methods, statistical methods, tests and measurements, psychological assessment; some courses with significant laboratory components may be appropriate here as well.

2. Diversity and Ethics

Psychologists must concern themselves with diversity, or the ways in which people differ from one another (Bucher, 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008; see also APA, 2003), including ethnicity, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, social class, culture, age, and religion. Culture is multifaceted, with connected components and influences touching on every aspect of daily life. Quality curricula need specialty courses and the infusion of culture into mainstream courses. Learning about diversity and culture should be a critical learning outcome for all students (see also chap. 4, this volume).

We believe ethics is fundamental to the study of psychology at every level. Faculty must ensure that students are familiar with the APA “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (APA, 2002a). Faculty and students should conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Ethics Code in all their coursework, research, and program-related activities.

Program Goal. Integrate diversity concerns across the curriculum.

Student Goal. Recognize existence of universal and culture-bound psychological principles; exhibit sensitivity, appreciation, and respect for all dimensions of human diversity.

Typical Courses. Introductory psychology, social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, clinical psychology, behavior disorders, life-span development. Although issues of diversity should be a concern in all courses, they are likely to be more salient in some than others.

Program Goal. Teach ethical awareness and skills across the curriculum.

Student Goal. Demonstrate ethical knowledge and skills appropriate to level of experience and education.

Typical Courses. Introductory psychology, research methods, clinical psychology, independent research, senior thesis.
3. Content Domains

In addition to introductory psychology and basic research methods, students should undertake coursework in four basic content domains of psychology. These domains are biological bases, learning and cognition, life-span developmental psychology, and sociocultural approaches.

Program Goal. Teach a balanced program incorporating core courses essential to the field.

Student Goal. Demonstrate knowledge of theory and research central to the major domains of the field.

Typical Courses. Learning, cognition, abnormal, personality, social psychology, biopsychology, animal behavior, life-span development, cross-cultural psychology, psychometrics.

4. Application

The application of knowledge gained during a student’s program of study is important. Quality programs provide students with opportunities to use their knowledge in an applied setting, such as human service agencies, laboratories, or independent study opportunities. Thus, service learning can contribute to the application of psychological knowledge. Students may also gain an appreciation of the discipline’s practical utility—how, for example, research findings can be used to improve employee well-being, manage business matters, or improve product design—through relevant coursework.

Program Goal. Teach a program with sufficient breadth to offer students exposure to a range of opportunities and applications in the field.

Student Goal. Demonstrate knowledge of theory and research associated with domains beyond the core subjects.

Typical Courses. Health psychology, psychology of adjustment, industrial and organizational psychology, human factors, counseling, careers in psychology, internship.

5. Integration

To encourage analysis, synthesis, and integration of students’ knowledge and experience, we recommend a culminating experience for all senior psychology majors. This may include capstone courses, internships, and research projects in collaboration with a faculty mentor. We note, too, that the authors of chapter 1 recommend integrative experiences consistent with contemporary, transdisciplinary liberal learning outcomes, ideally to develop lifelong learning alumni who are psychologically literate citizens.

Program Goal. Teach a program that integrates multiple perspectives and themes.

Student Goal. Demonstrate knowledge of overarching themes, broad or enduring controversies, and major problems in psychology.
Typical Courses. History and systems of psychology, advanced theory courses (e.g., personality, social, motivation, learning, development), independent research, special topics or other capstone activities.

Content in the Introductory Psychology Course

The introductory psychology course is the foundation for the psychology major as well as one of the cornerstones of social science general education programs nationwide. Around 1.5 million students take introductory psychology classes every year (Griggs, Jackson, & Napolitano, 1994). For psychology majors, intermediate and upper level specialized courses expand on material covered in the introductory course. For nonmajors, introductory psychology may be the only psychology class they ever take. Given the ubiquitous relevance of psychology to other majors and fields, most jobs, and the world in general, as well as the many contributions an understanding of psychology can have to personal growth and development, all students need to receive a common core of content.

Although many institutions already standardize the textbooks adopted for the introductory course, few standardize the content of what is taught. Variability in the content of the introductory course is accentuated because few faculty are well versed in all areas of psychology. Such broad training is not generally a part of graduate programs in which students are typically required to gain breadth in one or two areas of psychology beyond their main focus of study. Naturally, too, there is also variability in how well this course is taught at the postsecondary level. Given that the introductory course serves as a foundation for the major and is sometimes the only exposure to the field for nonmajors, widely variable content and delivery do the field and the students a disservice. Parallel to our call for a common core to the psychology major, we suggest a common core for the introductory psychology course.

Our recommendation for core content for the postsecondary introductory psychology class builds on established APA policy and existing guidelines. Although the guidelines (APA, 2007a) were designed for the major as a whole, we suggest that the introductory course also cover the same basic core areas as recommended for the major. The core content also builds on and is consistent with the curriculum offered in Advanced Placement Psychology (AP; College Board, 2007b) and The National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula (APA, 2005). The College Board develops the AP Psychology course on the basis of recommendations of psychology faculty consultants, and the course content is monitored and assessed by the Educational Testing Service.

The explicit understanding is that students who score high enough on the AP psychology exam receive college credit for introductory psychology. The irony that many AP psychology students are getting a more thorough exposure to the field of psychology than some students who take this course
in college is at least partially attributable to the lack of national consistency in the content of the introductory psychology course.

The Psychology Minor

Consistent with the model advocated for the major, the ideal psychology minor should include introductory psychology and coursework in research methods or statistics. As the model shown in Figure 3.1 advocates, methods and statistics are at the center of education in psychology. Students who minor in psychology must have a working knowledge of these disciplinary tools to truly appreciate the material presented in content courses. Some judicious substitutions might be possible here, as could be the case when a student’s major area of study includes a course or courses containing research methods or quantitatively based reasoning. If meaningful experience with methods and data analysis are removed, however, then we believe there would be little justification to label this concentration a minor in psychology. Additional coursework in the minor should reflect the content domains presented in Figure 3.1 to the extent department resources and curricular constraints allow.

Impact and Implications of the Proposed Curriculum

What will the impact of the proposed curricular changes be? Put another way, what will these changes prepare undergraduate psychology students to do? At the risk of sounding glib, these changes will prepare them for whatever they decide to do in the future. We believe that a rigorous undergraduate psychology major will prepare students for graduate education in psychology or some other field, just as it will prepare them for a meaningful career. We know that very few students pursue an advanced degree in psychology, but we also know that the psychology major is excellent training for the world of work (e.g., Appleby, 2000, 2007; Kuther & Morgan, 2004; Palladino Schultheiss, 2008; Rajckic et al., 2005). The skills acquired in the proposed core curriculum, both in terms of content and learning outcomes, will increase the likelihood of potential success and personal satisfaction no matter what paths students follow after earning a baccalaureate degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This discussion points to several clear recommendations concerning undergraduate education in psychology:

1. In light of the model presented in this chapter, psychology departments should evaluate their programs using quality benchmarks (Dunn et al., 2007).
2. Curricular review should pay particular attention to those areas that have been neglected in the past, which are likely to include matters of ethics, diversity, and integrative experiences.
3. The introductory psychology course should mirror the core model for the psychology major.
4. Introductory psychology should be a prerequisite for all other psychology courses.
5. Psychology majors and minors should enroll in research methods and statistics as soon as possible after completing introductory psychology.
6. Ongoing assessment and evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum in psychology, as well as its learning outcomes, is essential.
7. Future assessment and evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum in psychology, as well as its learning outcomes, is essential.

Dramatic changes in the 21st century threaten the traditional identity of psychology. Despite these changes, we believe that a core of scientific concepts and principles defines the discipline. Nowhere is this more important than in the undergraduate psychology curriculum. We reaffirm the place of scientific psychology in the liberal arts tradition. We advocate a core curriculum emphasizing scientific methodology and ensuring breadth and depth in substantive content areas of the discipline. We stress a clear focus on diversity and ethics throughout the psychology curriculum. The recommended core provides a coherent undergraduate experience for psychology majors and sufficient flexibility to accommodate the unique needs of individual programs and students.