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**Interoffice Communication**

To: Doug Eder, Director  
Undergraduate Assessment & Program Review

Through: Elliott Lessen, Dean  
School of Education

From: Bryce Sullivan *Bryce Sullivan*

Cc: Department of Psychology Faculty

Date: August 24, 2005

Re: Senior Assignment 3-Year Report (2002, 2003, 2004)

The Senior Assignment is a graduation requirement for all SIUE students, and it is designed as a method of showing that our students can demonstrate proficiency in both their major area and in the areas of study covered by our General Education requirements.

Over the three academic years covered by this report, the student performance in completing their Senior Assignment (SRA) projects met or exceeded the expectations of faculty in the Department of Psychology. The vast majority of our students exceeded expectations in all areas. Only a very small minority did not meet the highest expected goals and objectives. Even students who did not meet the expected levels of performance performed at an acceptable level. Therefore, at a minimum, all of the students graduating with a BS or BA in the Department of Psychology completed the SRA in a satisfactory manner.

The SRA in the Department of Psychology is the crowning achievement of our students' undergraduate careers. This program's recognition in the University community was exemplified when our department was chosen to make a special SRA presentation to the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Board of Trustees in the spring of 2005. This program is an example of the Department of Psychology "moving to the next level" of **SIUE** excellence.

Since our last three-year report, the department instituted a system whereby our SRA goals are mapped onto a Primary Trait Analysis (PTA). This method of assessment allows us to address any areas of deficiency in a more focused manner. The adoption of a PTA assessment has provided for the opportunity to make specific interventions based on the traits that were identified as needing work. For example, one class is occasionally lower or higher on a trait than other classes in the same cohort. When this occurs the faculty are able to address the matter through a recursive assessment process. Specifically, these differences can be traced to the instructional methods or other course-dependent issues that may have led to the differences in student outcome.

The Department of Psychology is very pleased with the work of our students. All of our faculty are involved in either mentoring our students or evaluating their SRA projects. It is rewarding for faculty to see the results of this mentoring demonstrated in exceptional SRA projects year after year. In a number of surveys that the Department of Psychology distributed to different samples of students in different years, the SRA experience was often cited as a positive experience.

As a result of our ongoing assessment of our SRA, last year we redesigned our curriculum to improve student outcomes. In the past we taught Psychological Statistics and Research Methods as separate courses. Starting this year these courses are an integrated sequence so that students will learn statistics and research methods in two integrated courses in which the topics are taught and applied together. These topics are fundamental in psychology, and a good understanding of the concepts taught is crucial to a successful SRA project. Additionally, in the years under consideration in this report (2002-2004), the SRA was completed in a number of Experimental Psychology classes or under individualized supervision by faculty. As a result of a number of factors including the feedback and evaluation process in our SRA system, the faculty decided to create a senior-level class called the Capstone Seminar in Psychology. These capstone classes will be structurally quite similar, but the psychology content areas under examination will differ. For example, this semester we have capstone seminars covering such topics as creativity and clinical psychology. The seminar classes are similar in that the senior assignment research projects will be handled in the same way in each of the classes. Students will have a variety of topics areas in which they may choose to complete the SRA, but the SRA projects themselves will be similar in terms of the research requirements, scholarly expectations, and research presentations. We are looking forward to seeing how these changes improve our students' learning.

Below are the Department of Psychology's baccalaureate goals. We currently use these goals to assess our Senior Assignment program and all aspects of our curriculum. You can see that these goals encompass both the Psychology major and the General Education program with goals such as capturing the history and context of a specific area of psychology as well as students having effective oral and written communication skills.

#### Baccalaureate Goals

- Clearly and concisely capture the history and context of a specific area of psychology
- Develop a well-constructed and testable hypothesis
- Design and conduct a methodologically sound research study
- Correctly analyze and interpret data
- Relate research findings to a broader cultural, social, historical, ethical, or economic realm
- Effectively communicate orally
- Effectively communicate in writing

During the period covered by this report, approximately 120 students successfully completed the SRA each year. The number of Psychology majors has increased, and we currently have approximately 150 students scheduled to complete the SRA this year. The

SRA research presentation occurs at the Department Poster session, the Psi Chi Honors Society Paper Sessions, and/or the Midwestern Psychology Association (MPA) conference. The MPA conference is a professional conference that is national in scope. This component of the SRA experience in Psychology is an exceptional opportunity for students. The following is a breakdown of the number of student presenters at MPA from 2001-2005:

Number of Student Presenters at Professional Conference

- 2001 – 33 student presenters
- 2002 – 16 student presenters
- 2003 – 22 student presenters
- 2004 – 44 student presenters
- 2005 – 30 student presenters

The funding provided by the Provost's Office—along with innovative faculty ideas and a strong departmental commitment—gave the Department of Psychology the resources to develop a strong and meaningful SRA program. Total funding for each of the three fiscal years under consideration in this report was \$15,025 in FY2002, \$14,430 in FY2003, and \$14,430 in FY2004. The total funding for these three years was \$43,885. Student graduate assistant support for the SRA program was the largest budget item. Two graduate students are employed in two 25% Graduate Assistant positions. These students work under the supervision of an SRA Faculty Coordinator and help administer the SRA program. The budget allocated to Graduate Assistantship support was 46.5% of the budget or \$20,385 for FY2002-FY2004. The next largest expenditure was in the area of student travel support. From FY2002-FY2004, \$15,500 was expended on student travel. This was 35.3% of the total budget. As listed above, this money funded 90 students to present their SRA research at the Midwestern Psychological Association conference in Chicago. Please see some attached photographs of our student presentations at the departmental poster session and the Midwestern Psychological Association paper session. The faculty believe the money devoted to student travel was money well spent. Faculty travel to the Midwestern Psychological Conference was also supported by the SRA funds. Faculty travel was 15.3% of the total funds or \$6,700. Finally, the smallest portion of funds went to covering some expenses to produce the posters for the conference. This totaled \$1,300 or 3.0% of the total funding.

Future funding is less secure—or perhaps even precarious. Our SRA budget for FY2006 is \$6,000. This is \$8,628 less or a 59% reduction from the average annual funding of the three years covered by this report. The School of Education Dean is increasing our departmental funding by \$3,500 to make up some of this shortfall. The remaining \$5,128 is not being covered by other funding sources. Student and faculty travel are the two areas that will be negatively affected by this reduction. The department is looking for other funding sources and is working on creative solutions to this financial development.

Our recent SRA history is one filled with great success. Aside from the funding issue, the future is bright with promise.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Faculty and students at Department Poster Session



Students at Department Poster Session



Students at Department Poster Session



Students at Midwestern Psychology Conference



Students at Midwestern Psychology Conference



Students at Department Poster Session

