

A Brief History of the Department of Psychology Bemidji State University

Bemidji State University began as a normal school in 1918, then became a state teachers college in 1921, a state college in 1957, and a state university in 1975. This early emphasis on teacher education, quite common among state universities, is reflected in the early psychology courses offered at the institution. The earliest courses were taught within the Education Department for prospective teachers, and covered material such as "mental hygiene." Perhaps because of these origins, even after becoming a separate department the Psychology Department for many years emphasized what were termed "service courses," courses offered with non majors in mind. Today, many current courses still have a higher enrollment of non majors than majors.

The first actual psychologist hired to teach at Bemidji State University was Ray Carlson, who began in 1952, teaching courses in human development and learning theories. Ray moved over to student services in 1956, becoming Dean of Students. Ray was influential in expanding offerings in psychology. He required all of the Counseling Center staff to teach psychology courses as a part of their duties, because he felt that the counselors would be in better touch with students if they spent time in the classroom, and because the practice increased the number of psychology classes that could be offered. When a separate Department of Psychology was formed, it was staffed by the joint appointment teacher/counselors from the Counseling Center and included two philosophers! Philosophy later became a separate department. The influence of that initial staffing of the Psychology Department by counselors can still be felt today, as a higher proportion of the current staff have degrees in Clinical or Counseling Psychology than is usual for an undergraduate department.

Psychology Major Established

In 1967, Katy Bradfield designed the curriculum for a new Psychology major, which included core courses in research and statistics, and began the floor plan for a part of the second floor of a new building, referred to as "Classroom" when first constructed, now called Hagg-Sauer, in which the department would be housed. Her plan contained ample space for small experimental labs. The department has continued to occupy the same offices and labs since that time, except for 1986-87 when the building was empty for asbestos removal. During that year the department had offices in one of the dormitories, which made for long walks to class but short walks to the bathroom! That same year, Oscar Rouck was hired to teach statistics, and to be the second full time faculty member of the department. Required courses for a B. A. in Psychology as listed in the 1970-72 undergraduate bulletin, consisted of a mathematics course in college algebra or elementary analysis, General Psychology I and II, Introductory Statistics, Statistical Inference, Experimental Psychology I, and a four quarter credit lab course called Experimental Psychology II. Elective credits were required to include at least fourteen quarter credits at the 400 level. A total of about sixty quarter credits was required. Although the institution converted from quarters to semesters in 1998, the major was not

dramatically different thirty years ago from what it is today, except for the increased sophistication of current computer assisted design and analysis, updated course work, and the addition of new elective areas such as cognition and psychophysiology.

Student Involvement in Research

Jim Rafferty, whose degree preparation is in Mathematical Psychology with an emphasis on Cognition was hired by the department in 1976, in part to relieve Russell Lee, a Counseling Psychologist, who was teaching Experimental Psychology. (In an interesting reversal, in 1993 the department hired Clinical Psychologist Richard Hook to take over teaching Experimental, then Counseling Psychologist Dwight Fultz began teaching the course in 1998.) Russ Bennett, whose degree preparation is in Experimental Social Psychology was hired in 1978, in part to relieve Jim, who had begun teaching Social Psychology. Russ Bennett's undergraduate and graduate programs had supported student research, and Russ Bennett and Jim decided to emphasize student research at Bemidji, creating a unique and important dimension of the undergraduate Psychology degree. They began co-teaching Experimental Psychology, and encouraged students to prepare material for presentation at regional and national conferences. A 1980-82 grant from the Minnesota State University System supported their establishment of the Cold Weather Behavioral Research Laboratory, designed to study human behavior in extremely cold conditions: a resource Bemidji has to an ample degree. Their first student co-authored paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association in the spring of 1980. One study that came out of the work of the Cold Weather Behavioral Research Laboratory has the dubious distinction of having been cited in The National Enquirer, a fact that the authors would probably wish had been omitted from this history. In the next fifteen years, twenty-four papers co-authored by students and by various departmental faculty were presented at national or regional professional conferences. At the same time, the department increased its involvement with the Minnesota Undergraduate Psychology Conference, hosting the conference in 1983 and presenting, over the years, more papers than any other Minnesota State university, indeed, often presenting more than all other Minnesota State Universities combined. Other current faculty members have continued the Psychology Department tradition of involving students in research and in paper presentations.

Community Service / Applied Psychology Major Established

In 1972, Katy Bradfield was again the main author of a new major, Community Service, housed within the Psychology Department. Responding to the Community Mental Health Act of 1963, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Schnauer Subprofessional Career Act of 1966, many human services programs were being established at the two year level to prepare students for entry into paraprofessional human service work. As a four year program the Community Service major was unique. The major was intended to provide education and training for students who wished to go into human services employment right after graduation from college. A separate two year A. S. program was also established, but was never very popular, and was ended after a few years. In its original design, the new major was to be a joint effort with the Social Work program, but

Social Work was unable to provide resources given the constraints of their accreditation requirements, and Psychology took the major over completely. The idea was that students who wished to prepare for graduate school to become psychologists would major in Psychology, and that students who wanted to prepare for immediate employment in a human services related field at the bachelors level would major in Community Service. Employment was increasing in jobs such as counselors in sexual assault programs and battered women's shelters, in day treatment programs, in residential treatment centers for adolescents, in crisis shelters, as chemical dependency counselors and in a wide variety of other human service agencies.

Required courses for a B. S. in Community Service as listed in the 1974-75 undergraduate bulletin, consisted of course work in Anatomy, Physiology, Consumer Economics, Nutrition, Introduction to Public Administration, General Psychology I and II, Psychology of Adjustment, Human Sexuality, Behavior Modification, Abnormal Psychology, Introduction to Sociology, Modern Social Problems, Introduction to Social Work, Social Work Practice Skills I and II, Field Experience in Social Work I and II, a Speech class, five one-quarter hour Community Service Seminars, and a sixteen quarter credit internship. Additionally students selected a skill area consisting of at least twenty quarter credits in at least one of eleven areas: Agency Management, Child Development, Corrections, Drugs and Health, Gerontology, Law Enforcement, Mental Health, Recreation, Retardation, Social Work, or Nursing. The major involved roughly one hundred and fifty quarter hours of credits, out of the one hundred and ninety-two required for graduation. This was a huge number of credits for a major to require. The next catalog reflected the withdrawal of the Social Work program from the major and an awareness that the major was too large, in that the required courses had been reduced by eliminating Social Work Practice Skills I and II, and Field Experience in Social Work I and II, replacing them with two Psychology department skills classes: Human Relations and Introduction to Interviewing and Testing.

Curricular Change within the Community Service/ Applied Psychology Major

Over time, the curriculum of the Community Service Program and its successor, Applied Psychology: Human Services, was frequently adjusted, as is to have been expected with a new program, but until the curriculum change of 1998 remained interdisciplinary, although including a progressively higher percentage of mainstream psychology courses, with a core of required courses and a selection of areas of emphasis. The 1979-80 catalog introduced the first of three significant revisions: the introduction of a learning theory prerequisite for Behavior Modification, new courses in crisis management and in program management, and the creation of a separate interviewing class, later called Basic Counseling Techniques. The assessment portion of the earlier Interviewing and Testing was placed into a new course called Personality and Assessment. At that time, psychology majors took separate courses in Personality Theories and in Measurement if they chose to. Personality and Assessment was replaced as a separate course for Community Service majors by the two traditional psychology courses in the second significant revision, introduced in the catalog of 1988. That revision tightened the

requirements for the major, eliminating non-psychology courses from the core, and changed the name of the major to Applied Psychology: Human Services, to reflect the increased psychological content.

Each of the three most significant revisions of the Applied Psychology major occurred roughly ten years apart. The third significant revision, introduced in the 1998 catalog, was prompted in part by several years of self assessment which included, among other measures, alumni surveys and regular administration of the ETS Major Field Test in Psychology. The department noted that as a group Applied Psychology students did not perform as well on the ETS Major Field Test in Psychology as did regular Psychology students. While this was to be expected given the interdisciplinary nature of many of the curriculum choices available to Applied Psychology Students, meaning that they studied curricular material not assessed by the ETS test, the alumni surveys suggested that some Applied Psychology majors did apply to and gain admission to graduate school programs in Psychology and in allied fields after working for a few years (and that some regular Psychology majors worked in human services positions and did not apply to graduate school). In the 1998 curriculum Introduction to Statistics and Research became a required course for both regular Psychology and Applied Psychology majors, and the interdisciplinarity of Applied Psychology was further reduced, although interdisciplinary minors were to be encouraged. Thus although the missions of the two majors did not change, the distinctions between them were curricularly reduced.

Training in Applied Psychological Skills

Since the beginning of its history, the Psychology Department has been staffed in large part by Counseling and Clinical Psychologists. No doubt the presence of those faculty has influenced the establishment of the curriculum of the Applied Psychology major. The major has always required a supervised internship (sites the department has used now number in the hundreds) and has, since its inception, featured skills classes. Although the staff would not use words like "psychologist" or "psychotherapist" to describe the human services jobs that bachelors level graduates from the program obtain, these jobs frequently entail individual and group counseling sessions and other forms of psychological intervention with adjudicated youth, battered or sexually assaulted women, clients at halfway houses, chemical dependency clients and a variety of other folks in crisis. The skills classes have included interpersonal, crisis, counseling, and, embedded in broader course work, group, and behavioral skills.

In 1970, Katy Bradfield designed the Psychology Department area of Hagg-Sauer hall to have observation rooms as well as experimental rooms. The observation rooms had audio pickups and two-way mirrors, so that when students were inside the rooms conducting practice interviews, the instructor could stand outside each room and, using earphones, listen to the interviews while observing them through the two-way mirror. A separate control room allowed the instructor to monitor the audio of several rooms at one time. When audio tape recording became more compact and more affordable, students were able to conduct their interviews without the teacher present. The teacher would listen to the tapes at a later time, and give the student feedback in written form or in person. When

videotape recording became available, supervision of interviews improved considerably. Katy's observation rooms are now used as videotaping rooms. Teaching these skills classes is very time consuming. During spring quarter of 1998, for example, Louise Jackson required her eighteen Basic Counseling students to videotape four practice counseling sessions of at least thirty minutes, then conducted forty-five minute supervision sessions for each student's videotape: fifty-four hours of supervision during a ten week quarter in addition to time in class.

Prior to the establishment of the Community Service Program, most human services positions in this area were filled by employees without college degrees. The competence level of the department's majors became very attractive to human services employers. The skill training offered by the Psychology Department has been influenced by regularly soliciting the opinions of area human services employers, either via surveys or through a community advisory board, about the skills that they wished their new employees to possess. Perhaps a result, the employment placement rate of Community Service, then Applied Psychology majors has exceeded 90% for the last twenty years.

Teaching Evaluations and Outstanding Teaching

Around 1970, the Psychology Department began conducting formal student evaluations of teaching. Formal student evaluations of teaching were not then conducted by most academic departments, and their use was controversial, but the department needed to have a more objective measure of teaching performance, given the interpersonal conflicts in the department at that time that might have clouded people's judgments about their colleagues' teaching. Originally, faculty passed out and collected the evaluation forms in their own classes. In 1986, during a second time of conflict, the department established a policy of having the forms passed out and collected by student workers so that faculty would not have the opportunity to influence the assessment process. From its earliest years, the department has placed a high value on good teaching, and an equally high value on strong student course evaluations, and has seriously considered these in decisions of retention, tenure, and promotion.

Perhaps as a result of this emphasis on student evaluations, the department now boasts some of the highest teacher ratings in the institution. During winter quarter of 1998, for example, the department mean on the student evaluation-of-teaching item "Taking everything into account I consider this instructor..." was 3.54 on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high). Two faculty, Jim Rafferty and Russ Lee, have been awarded the University-wide Outstanding Teaching Award (Jim twice!). Psychology is the only department in the university to have two current teachers who have received that award.

Psychology Students

The size of the major in terms of numbers of students has, although fluctuating from year to year, stayed rather constant overall. If one compares a five year average of on-campus student enrollment in psychology from almost twenty years ago to an average of the last five years, one finds that although the on campus FTE enrollment of the university has gone down slightly from 3,791 students to 3,478 (Bemidji State University Office of Institutional Research) in that time, psychology enrollment has increased slightly, from 219 majors and 41 graduates per year to 225 majors and 50 graduates per year.