

Developing Course Goals via Departmental Input

Faculty Teaching Certificate Program II
Capstone Project

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Background and Purpose

In my attempt to redesign the Introduction to Psychology course, hereafter referred to as “intro”, I determined that the goals of this course were unclear. In fact, I had not listed learning goals in my own syllabus for the course. When I attempted to determine goals, I wondered whether my goals were congruent with my colleagues in the department who also teach this course. I made several informal attempts to gather this information and was a bit surprised by the findings. Anecdotally, I heard that the course should serve two purposes; these were: (a) give people a general overview of what psychology is (a grand task, to be sure) and (b) give students a foundation for future psychology courses. I am well aware that a very small minority of students who take intro ever take another psychology course, let alone major in psychology. Thus, the course primarily serves a general education function in the university and these purposes seemed unsatisfactory. So, I set out to more formally seek input from my departmental colleagues regarding the learning goals for intro with the intention of using their feedback to drive my course redesign.

Method

I gathered data in two steps. First, I sent out an email to the psychology department faculty email list with the following text:

"Dear colleagues,

I am interested in receiving your feedback regarding appropriate goals for the PSYC 101 "Introduction to Psychology" course. I am in the process of re-designing my own section of intro as a project in the Faculty Teaching Certificate Program II (FTCP II). One step in this process that I thought would be helpful would be to solicit your perspectives on how this course fits into our psychology major and into the general education requirements of the university. I felt that this could be operationalized in course learning goals. I would like you to know that I intend to share the results of this project, including your feedback without identifying information, with my small FTCP II group at the end of this semester. My write-up may also be posted on the CETL website (again, without identifying information). If you have a few brief minutes and would be willing to help me, I would appreciate it if you would list what you believe should be the top 3 to 8 learning goals of PSYC 101 on the attached form. Feel free to email them back to me at kevin.filter@mnsu.edu or put them in my mail box. If you are going to participate, please return the forms by Friday, April 14th. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your help!"

Attached to the email was a form on which to record learning goals (see Appendix). My intention with this data was to look for themes in the responses and create larger goals on consensus.

The second step in my data collection process was to organize a “drop-in and talk” session for faculty members in the department. I informed my colleagues of this meeting by sending another email with the following text:

“Dear Colleagues,

As a follow-up to the last email, I would like to arrange a time with those of you who would like to discuss issues relating to PSYC 101 further to get together and talk. Your completion of the “Goals” form in no way implies that you intend to participate in this meeting. So, please don’t feel obligated to participate in either the goals portion of my project or the meeting portion. If you would like to participate in an open-ended meeting about PSYC 101 (for support, to share, to collaborate, or to vent), please let me know and I will try to accommodate everyone’s schedule. Let me know if you have any interest or questions. Hope to hear from you! Take care.”

A date and time were arranged based on availability of people who expressed interest.

We met in the department conference room on May 2nd, 2006.

Results

Goals.

I received three email responses with learning goals for intro. The number of goals on each list ranged from two to six. I combined those goals with my own to create themes. In total, 19 goals were analyzed. The themes that I deduced were are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Themes of Learning Goals for Introduction to Psychology Provided by
Psychology Faculty

Goal #	Goal (Theme)	# of Goals which Matched this Theme	# of Respondents who reported this Theme
1	Develop critical thinking for psychological issues	6 out of 19	4 out of 4
2	Apply psychology principles to life	4 out of 19	2 out of 4
3	Become familiar with some basic principles and theories	4 out of 19	2 out of 4
4	Understand the range of psychology (careers and subject matter)	3 out of 19	2 out of 4
5	Develop an interest/appreciation for psychology	3 out of 19	2 out of 4

Drop- in and Talk.

Only one person attended the “drop-in and talk” session on May 2nd. Two other faculty members inquired as to the details of the meeting and one apologized for not being able to attend due to a classroom conflict. Myself and the other faculty member discussed general issues regarding intro, including frustrations and things we’ve tried in class that have been successful in promoting learning. From this, I gathered at least one activity idea that would relate to goal #1 from Table 1. Also, this faculty member expressed a general agreement with the themes listed in Table 1, providing some anecdotal support for these goals.

Discussion and Conclusions

I am glad that I was able to discuss the topic of learning goals for intro with my departmental colleagues. I would have like to have had input from more people but the information that I received was helpful for me in my planning. I now intend to use the five goals listed in Table 1 as a basis for developing more classroom activities and assessments in intro.

Appendix

Learning Goals Data Collection Form

Recommended Learning Goals for Introduction to Psychology (PSYC 101)

Please list at least 3 but not more than 8 learning goals. Feel free to email them back to me at kevin.filter@mnsu.edu or put them in my mail box. Thank you for participating!

Goal #1:

Goal #2:

Goal #3:

Goal #4:

Goal #5:

Goal #6:

Goal #7:

Goal #8: