

General Psychology Assessment Report: Spring 2016

An assessment plan was implemented in the Spring 2016 semester to evaluate the impact of the PSYC 2003: General Psychology course. Students enrolled in a large (N=318) section of General Psychology taught by a senior faculty member completed a 28-item General Psychology pretest on the second day of classes, prior to the presentation of any course material. Items for the test were taken from tests previously administered by the instructor; most items were selected by two independent faculty members with experience teaching General Psychology to represent the core concepts of the field. The instructor was not aware of the items that were selected or which students were participating in the assessment. A total of 227 students completed the pretest; the number of correct answers was the pretest score. Students were also asked to indicate whether they have taken any previous Psychology courses in high school or college; unfortunately, these data were not recorded and therefore analyses that might have blocked on this factor were not conducted.

During the semester, the items on the pretest were embedded in the examinations administered by the instructor; seven items corresponding to the content of the examination were included on each of four tests during the semester. The total number of correct answers on the critical questions across the semester was computed for each participating student and constituted the posttest score. A total of 170 students took all of the tests at the scheduled time during the semester.

Primary analysis: Effectiveness of course

Scores on the pretest indicated that the participating students had only minimal mastery of the course content. The average score for the 227 participating students was 12.83 (45.8%, a badly failing grade). Scores on the posttest of those students who completed all exams during the semester indicated that the participating students had significantly increased their mastery of the course material. The average score for these students was 20.31 (72.5%, corresponding to a grade in the middle of the C range, and a 58% increase over the pretest average). To test the pretest-posttest difference, a paired *t*-test was conducted between pretest and posttest scores for the 170 students who had taken all of the exams during the course of the semester; a highly significant difference was obtained, $t(169) = 22.65, p < .0001$.

Additional analyses

A total of 57 students who took the pretest did not complete all four of the exams for the course; the majority of these students dropped the course before the end of the semester. To determine if there was any initial differences in pretest scores between those who completed the course and those who did not, a *t*-test was conducted, and a marginally significant difference was found, $t(225) = 2.87, p < .005$. The average pretest score for those completing all four of the course exams was 13.14 (45.8%); the average pretest score for those who did not complete all four of the course exams was 11.92 (42.6%).

The pattern of performance of students who had completed all exams across the course of the

semester was also investigated. The number of correct answers for the seven pretest items included on each of the four exams was analyzed using a repeated-measures analysis of variance procedure, and a highly significant effect was found, $F(3, 657) = 62.10, p < .001$. Performance improved consistently over the course of the semester ($M_{\text{Exam One}} = 4.16$ (59.4%); $M_{\text{Exam Two}} = 4.84$ (69.1%); $M_{\text{Exam Three}} = 5.07$ (72.4%); $M_{\text{Exam Four}} = 5.72$ (81.7%).

Finally, there was a significant positive correlation between students' scores of the pretest and scores of the posttest, $r(168) = +.26$.

These results clearly indicate that students taking PSYC 2003 are learning the content material in the field of psychology as part of their core requirements in the social sciences. As our assessment plan notes, the questions that are included in this assessment map onto the learning objectives for the social sciences. Future assessments beginning this year will include more fine-grained analyses in order to determine whether all learning goals are being met at acceptable levels. Results from these analyses will inform the Department of Psychological Science as to what aspects, if any, of PSYC 2003 may need to be enhanced in order for us to best serve our students and their learning objectives in this course as part of the social science core.