



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

**Curriculum Review 2023/2024**  
**Department of Psychology**

## **Curriculum Review Team**

Dr. Simon Spanswick, Director Undergraduate Studies

Dr. Susan Boon, Associate Head

Dr. Claire Midgley, Assistant Professor

Katelyn Horsley, Graduate Assistant

Laine Kelly, Psychology Undergraduate Students ' Association representative

Alice Gao, Academic Program Specialist

## Overview and Context of the Psychology Program

The Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary consists of 36 core faculty and 4 staff members. Our department is committed to advancing psychological knowledge, developing students' potential, and promoting well-being in our communities. This mission statement is founded on a set of department values that include a focus on EDIA (equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility), integrity, discovery and innovation, health and well-being, and a sense of community.

Psychology is one of the largest undergraduate programs within the Faculty of Arts. We currently support 924 majors across our BA/BA (Honours) and BSc/BSc (Honours) degree programs (data from the F23 semester). Despite continued high demand for our program we are proud to offer an evidence-based curriculum that is competitive with other Canadian and international institutions.

To meet this high level of demand our department offers a large number of courses, with 84 separate undergraduate course sections taught in the 23/24 academic year. Our 200/300 level courses also provide service to majors from other academic units. For example, PSYC 203 – Psychology of Everyday Life, is a particularly popular option for many students at the University of Calgary (1152 enrollees across all sections in 2022/23).

We maintain an experiential focus in our undergraduate curriculum, including an active research environment, as well as co-op options for our students. The addition of our applied methods courses (PSYC 400.XX) as a result of the 2016 curriculum review, provides students an even greater opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience. The department is committed to our undergraduates and excellence in pedagogy, as is evidenced by our many teaching award nominations and recipients.

Our approach to undergraduate education is directly informed by our mission and values. The Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) listed below were established as a result of our 2016 curriculum review and a more recent review of the academic landscape. These reflect our vision of the knowledge and skills that our majors should be well positioned to achieve by graduation.

1. Demonstrate knowledge of psychological sciences
2. Think critically and solve problems
3. Conduct research and analyze data
4. Communicate effectively
5. Demonstrate information literacy
6. Understand and implement ethical principles in a diverse world
7. Apply psychological knowledge and skills
8. Demonstrate multicultural competence and awareness of issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## 2023 Curriculum Review Guiding Questions

Below are the guiding questions that informed the current psychology curriculum review. They were developed by the undergraduate education committee in consultation with the broader department. The Department of Psychology voted on and approved the guiding questions at the Feb 8, 2023 department meeting.

### 1. Were the goals identified in our previous curriculum review achieved?

**Rationale:** Our initial review resulted in an extensive retooling of the psychology curriculum in 2016. As a result of our analysis a list of 37 action items was produced. An assessment of the successes and challenges related to the goals of our initial curriculum review would be informative moving forward.

### 2. What are the current strengths of our program? Are there areas that we might improve?

**Rationale:** Our psychology program is among a number offered at post-secondary institutions in Canada. As the University of Calgary is part of the U15 (<https://u15.ca/>) it makes sense to ensure that our program aligns with other group members and that we continue to “foster the development and delivery of long-term, sustainable higher education and research policy, in Canada and around the world”. An environmental scan of the U15, in addition to other data sources, will allow us to identify strengths, challenges, and potential gaps in our curriculum.

### 3. How does our undergraduate program promote Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Accessibility (EDIA)?

**Rationale:** A recent departmental review of our honours program revealed a number of potential roadblocks that may have impacted diverse groups from accessing the resources necessary to successfully apply for an honours degree. Our findings have inspired us to review our approach to EDIA throughout our undergraduate program. Importantly, this aligns with the University of Calgary’s strategic plan to ‘advance sustainable EDIA goals and objectives’ (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion>).

### 4. How do we support mental health and wellbeing in our students, faculty, and staff?

**Rationale:** Recent events have highlighted the importance of considering the mental health and wellbeing of the students, faculty, and staff in our department. As noted in the campus mental health strategy “Our vision is to be a community where we care for each other, learn and talk about mental health and well-being, receive support as

needed, and where individually and collectively we realize our potential.”  
(<https://www.ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/strategy>)

**5. What tools do we provide our students to promote academic success?**

**Rationale:** Recent discussions with several faculty members have highlighted that students lack some of the skills necessary for success in our senior-level courses. It remains to be seen if this anecdotal data is supported by a more formal analysis, but a review of the available data should highlight the potential need to address this concern.

## Psychology Undergraduate Curriculum Review Action Plan

A thorough review of the data by the undergraduate program committee, in consultation with the broader department, has resulted in a list of actionable items. The plan is organized according to the five guiding questions that directed our data collection and analysis. The psychology department met on May 8, 2024 to discuss and formally approve the action plan provided below.

### 1. Were the goals identified in our previous curriculum review achieved?

**Item 1:** Review the action plan list from the 2016 curriculum review

**Rationale:** Given the extensive retooling of the psychology program in 2016 it is worth ensuring that the action plan items from the previous review were completed,

### 2. What are the current strengths of our program? Are there areas that we might improve?

**Item 2:** Review and update our current course offerings

**Rationale:** A scan of our calendared courses revealed that nine of them have not been scheduled for at least seven years. This has led to confusion in our undergraduate students. A revision and update of our course offerings will provide them with more accurate information and clarity in their degree progression.

**Item 3:** Review and, if necessary, revise our Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and establish consistent administration of our Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

**Rationale:** The psychology department's PLOs were introduced as a result of the 2016 curriculum review and updated several years ago. It would be advisable to revisit our PLOs and adjust/update them if required. There is also some inconsistency in how our CLOs are deployed. A review of how to establish and align CLOs with our curriculum would be beneficial.

### 3. How does our undergraduate program promote Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Accessibility (EDIA)?

**Item 4:** Provide widely accessible program information for our undergraduate students.

**Rationale:** It was evident from our student survey that many undergraduates are unaware of the diverse areas of study within psychology, as well as the career options that are available to them upon graduation. Our co-op and honour's programs are also poorly advertised. Providing this information to a broad audience early in their degree progression would aid in increasing EDIA in our program.

**Item 5:** Investigate methods to increase EDIA in our undergraduate course offerings

**Rationale:** The information collected from the current curriculum review revealed that while we are doing well in terms of incorporating EDIA content and practices in our program there is room for improvement.

#### 4. How do we support mental health and wellbeing in our students, faculty, and staff?

**Item 6:** Provide course instructors with standardized wellness resources for our students

**Rationale:** The recent student survey identified that we are generally doing well in terms of providing our undergraduates with wellness resources. However, our course instructors would benefit from a standardized approach to delivering wellness information. This would reduce the demands on our instructors and provide students with consistent messaging regarding wellness, EDIA, etc.

**Item 7:** Discuss methods that would allow course instructors to balance teaching course content with other course requirements and student expectations.

**Rationale:** Several course instructors identified demands beyond teaching in the classroom (e.g. course management, student emails) that require a significant time investment.

#### 5. What tools do we provide our students to promote academic success?

**Item 8:** Increase student awareness of our honours and co-op programs.

**Rationale:** Our student survey revealed that many of our undergraduates are ill-informed about our honours and co-op options. A large portion of students are unaware of the details of the programs until it is too late for them to apply. This could be resolved by providing consistent and early messaging regarding research and work placement in the psychology program.

**Item 9:** Review and clarify department policies regarding assessments, including due dates, extensions, etc.

**Rationale:** The large number of courses that we offer has resulted in a variety of approaches to assignments extensions, etc. A review of our approaches and clarification of how they are deployed would be beneficial to our students.

**Item 10:** Provide our students with more information about our diverse course offerings and available career options after graduation.

**Rationale:** As mentioned in items 5 and 9 advertising in our program is relatively poor. For example, despite offering a variety of senior-level courses focused on research experience (PSYC 499, 504, and 505) many of our undergraduate are unaware of these as options.

**Item 11:** Explore offering special topics courses in each area of psychology.

**Rationale:** Many of our 400/500 level courses are taught by a single faculty member that has expertise in the specific content area. Unfortunately, this means that when they are unavailable the course cannot be scheduled, often leading to difficulties with student enrolment, etc. Creating a more generic course listing in each of our topic areas (e.g. development, cognition, social, etc.) would create more flexibility while still allowing our area experts to offer their courses.