

Significant Professional Activity Statement
Psychology Department
Fall 1989
(minor grammatical revisions, Fall, 2003)

Preamble

Within the field of psychology there are a number of specialty areas (e.g., social, cognitive, developmental, physiological, etc.). In addition to these subdisciplines, psychology is also divided into experimental and clinical fields. These are not mutually exclusive categories nor is one considered superior to the other. Rather, they are two different but related, and often intertwined, ways of being a professional psychologist.

The Psychology Department values interdisciplinary work in which faculty contribute knowledge, insights, and techniques from a psychological perspective. As students of the mind and behavior, psychologists often work with professionals in other disciplines to broaden the knowledge base. Needless to say, psychologists also benefit from the broadened perspective received in collaboration with members of other disciplines.

Professional Applications and Publications

Significant professional activity may be primarily research oriented and have the traditional academic output of scholarly publications and presentations. Other significant professional activity may include psychotherapy (e.g., with individual or groups) or other applications of psychology; these latter activities may or many not result in traditional academic output and thus subjective judgement must play a major role in evaluation.

Professional Applications

Many psychologists make professional contributions through activity that is not primarily research oriented. The following list provides examples of this kind of professional activity. It does not reflect a hierarchy in terms of the significance or value of these activities.

- Psychotherapy
- Consultation
- Software Development

Publications

One way in which psychologists disseminate the results of their professional activity – both experimental and clinical – is through publication. Scholarly journals in which psychologists publish articles differ in terms of whether or not a peer review process is employed. As may be seen in the rank order below, the psychology department gives greater value to publications that have been evaluated by a peer review process than those that have not. Published books and chapters are also valued more than non-refereed publications. It is important to note, however, that while the hierarchical order given below will be applicable

in many if not most cases, the psychology department recognizes that there will be exceptions. Some book chapters, for example, may be more prestigious than certain journal articles. Thus the hierarchy should not be regarded as a rigid ranking. Finally, because being asked to review manuscripts submitted for publication is one way in which an individual's professional colleagues indicate that they value his or her judgement and regard him or her as an expert in a particular area, the psychology department also recognizes the importance of this activity.

- Refereed Articles or Reports
- Books
- Chapters
- Non-refereed Articles or Reports
- Reviews of Manuscripts Submitted for Publications
- Unpublished Work

Presentations

In addition to contributing to the field of psychology through direct service, consultation, and publication, presenting information or theories about psychological issues is an important professional activity. Presentations may be scholarly and oriented to a professional audience or may be more oriented to the general public. Also included in this category are instances of leadership, such as serving as the chair of a panel or symposium. Although the psychology department values presentations to scholarly audiences over presentations to the general public, we recognize that this hierarchy is not absolute. There will be instances, for example, in which an invited address to a general audience will be more prestigious than a presentation to a scholarly audience. Thus the hierarchy should not be viewed as a rigid ranking.

- Presentations to Scholarly Audiences
- Presentations to General Audiences
- Leadership

Grants

In light of the fact that many research projects and professional applications in psychology require external funding for their implementation, the psychology department views receiving grants and reviewing submitted grants as important professional activities. Generally speaking, grants from the national funding agencies (e.g., NSF, NIH, NIMH) will be more prestigious than grants from local sources (e.g., St. Olaf College, Blandin Foundation). The psychology department does not regard this hierarchy as a rigid ranking, however.

- Receiving Grants – National Agencies, Local Agencies
- Reviewing Submitted Grants – National Agencies, Local Agencies

Honors and Recognitions

Psychologists are often recognized and honored for their professional activity. These kinds of honors and awards may be extended by national and local associations and groups. In many but certainly not all cases, national awards will be more prestigious than local awards.

- National Honors and Recognitions
- Local Honors and Recognitions

Professional Organizations

Psychologists are often involved in professional associations and societies. Thus membership, attendance at meetings or conferences, and holding an office or position of responsibility in these organizations are all viewed as important professional activities. Generally speaking, holding an office or position of responsibility in a professional organization is valued more highly than attending meetings or being a member of that organization. In addition, although there will be exceptions, in many cases involvement in national organizations will be more prestigious than local organizations.

- Offices Held or Positions of Responsibility – National, Local
- Attendance at Meetings of Professional Organizations
- Membership in Professional Organizations

Closing Comments

Evaluations of professional activities in psychology tend to be carried out according to criteria that are either objective or subjective. For example, publications and papers typically are used as evidence of research-oriented professional activity, with some assurance that peer review processes have already documented the quality of the work. Thus evaluation of this work is often viewed as objective. After all, one need merely count the number of publications and presentations listed on an individual's curriculum vitae. Caution must be exercised, however, even with this seemingly objective criterion because a single research grant funded for several years, for example, may be the equivalent of a dozen or more research projects of shorter duration.

The psychology department recognizes that the evaluation of professional applications is more difficult due to the often-subjective nature of these activities. We offer the following questions as guidelines, therefore, to assist in the evaluation of professional applications in psychology: Is there a continuing clientele? What kinds of feedback regarding the quality of work are available from supervisors and clients? How frequently is the individual sought out as an expert, speaker, editor, or consultant?

Conclusion

In conclusion, evaluation of professional activity in psychology is a challenging undertaking. Whereas certain kinds of activities fit neatly and concisely into traditional academic categories of evaluation, other kinds of applications do not. The major source of this difficulty lies in the nature of the discipline itself; psychology is not now, and never has been, a tidy field. In addition, there is

and always has been a certain amount of tension between the experimental and clinical areas of psychology; in the resulting dialectic, theories, techniques, and discoveries from one area inform and are, in turn, informed by theories, techniques, and discoveries from other areas. The psychology department regards this as a healthy phenomenon, one that is growth-promoting for the field of psychology as well as the individuals in it.