

Dear CEP:

This document provides the Department of Psychology's incomplete response to your request for a plan on how we may deal with the proposed "Disciplinary Communication" requirement. Our response is incomplete simply because of the insufficient amount of time given to consider this plan, and find a practical way of possibly implementing it within our curriculum. For this reason, we are unable at this time to fully respond, and only sketch some ideas we are presently considering, but make no commitment to adopting. Although many of us are enthusiastic about the idea of teaching writing within our discipline, the Department of Psychology is a large, diverse faculty with a corresponding complex curriculum structure. Our intellectual diversity, size, and curriculum structure, especially in the upper-division, present us with significant challenges in easily creating an agreed-upon way to satisfy the proposed DC requirement. We simply need more time to work all of this out to the faculty's general satisfaction.

As you know, CEP approached Psychology last year in the hopes of having us participate in a pilot program where we would try to incorporate the new DC requirement within our curriculum, and then explore the feasibility of us, as just one large department on campus, adopting this new vision of how writing/communication is taught. We were unable to agree on an acceptable plan at that time, with many faculty members voicing serious concern about the workload involved in taking this on. Unfortunately, the plan that we considered at that time, which was to have the DC requirement be satisfied in our "senior seminar" courses, was rejected by the faculty, despite the fact that this possibility would be the simplest, in structural terms, for us to implement (i.e., all majors must take one "senior seminar" course). One of the biggest complaints from faculty was a significant concern about us having sufficient TA and writing-tutor resources to carry out an effective DC class.. This issue of having sufficient assistance to teach DC relevant courses will likely continue to be a major concern as we move on with creating a working plan for Psychology, and CEP must be aware of this potential stumbling block as the campus further considers CEP's proposal.

Before we sketch some tentative solutions to the DC requirement, and list various educational objectives that such a requirement may achieve, we want to briefly report on our early attempts to get a better sense of what we already do with writing instruction within Psychology. Prompted by Jaye Padgett's visit to the Department last February, we decided to take a closer look at the amount and kinds of writing that students do in our undergraduate curriculum. If we only consider students' requirement to take two courses in each of 4 areas in our upper-division curriculum (e.g., social, developmental, cognitive, personality/clinical), students appear to write around **105** pages to within this group of courses alone. This number likely underestimates the amount of writing students do in the upper-division given that students typically take more than the required 8 courses overall (and this figure does not include estimates of the number of pages students write in their various research apprenticeship classes, Psych 194, which several hundreds of our students do each year). Furthermore, the DC requirement will undoubtedly have to be satisfied in some manner within the upper-division, because CEP is insisting that students fulfill the DC requirement within the major (which means

transfer students must fulfill the requirement here at UCSC). But, for the record, our students appear to write on average **90** pages to satisfy their lower-division course requirements. Thus, an average student coming to study Psychology at UCSC from the beginning of their college career till graduation appears to be writing close to **200** pages within Psychology alone (and, again, this figure is likely to be an underestimate given the number of courses students actually take within Psychology as majors).

We are just now beginning to explore all these figures more closely, but at the very least, they indicate that Psychology majors are doing quite a bit of writing during their undergraduate careers. The type of writing done within our curriculum is incredibly diverse, including APA style write-ups of empirical data, observational analyses, research proposals, reviews of the literature within certain fields and/or topics, book reviews, and personal narratives. Although students are required to re-write papers in several of our classes, and often receive informal feedback on drafts from faculty and teaching assistants, many papers are likely written with little feedback during the composition process. Within many of our courses, students also participate in other activities that may be included under the umbrella idea of “disciplinary communication,” such as presenting posters, and giving various formal and informal class and section presentations. We will soon try to collate more information about these various communication activities that occur within our courses to better understand the range and depth of how DC already is taught within Psychology.

In general, Psychology majors are clearly engaged in extensive, varied writing and communication activities within our courses. Our greatest challenge, then, is for us to determine (a) whether there are certain activities (e.g., writing APA style research reports) that all upper-division students must do to satisfy the DC requirement, ones that meet educational objectives that we can all agree upon, or (b) whether students will have more freedom as to which kind of courses they take, and therefore receive training in certain disciplinary communication skills, but not others. We need more time to ultimately decide this issue.

With all this in mind, here is, again, a very tentative list of educational objectives, and two broad approaches to satisfying the proposed DC requirement.

Educational Objectives

Students should acquire the skills how to:

1. Write APA style research reports that present main idea, past research literature, methods, data and relevant statistical analyses, and theoretical implications.
2. Write literature reviews of previous theories and empirical findings that provide a coherent conceptual analysis of this material.
3. Write research proposals that present new possible ideas for empirical test, and ways to appropriately conduct these tests.
4. Write reflective narratives that express their own observations, about themselves and others, on mind and behavior.

5. Present empirical evidence in a poster and be able to describe this work as would be done at many professional meetings within the discipline.
6. Give clear, professional oral presentations in class on relevant topics, theories, and research.

How to Meet Educational Objectives

Possible Plan 1.

The first plan is to revisit the previously rejected idea of having students complete their DC requirement within their senior seminar classes. These classes are small enough (20-35) for faculty and TAs to have students write relevant papers, provide them with feedback for writing of additional drafts, and allow students to give oral presentations relevant to the subject matter of these courses (and receive guidance and feedback on these presentations).

The main advantages of this plan are that the senior seminar classes are small enough, compared to all other upper-division courses in Psychology, so that students could be given the specific individual attention needed to facilitate development of their DC skills. Moreover, this plan would, by far, be the easiest to implement structurally within the discipline because, once more, senior seminars are the only courses that all majors must take. (with students being free to select from a menu of courses for their other upper-division requirements in the four areas of social, developmental, cognitive, and personality/clinical).

The disadvantage of this plan is that the type, and range of DC activities that students would engage in would, as it now stands, depend on which particular senior seminar class they took (e.g., course A may emphasize educational objective 1 above, while course B may emphasize objective 4).

Possible Plan 2

The second approach to meeting the DC requirement is for the department to (a) agree on the set of educational objectives that all students must meet, and (b) present a menu of courses within the upper-division, across all four areas of the curriculum, where those objectives would be met. Unlike possible plan 1, this second alternative assumes that no single course could or would meet all of the DC objectives, and so the DC requirement would be spread out across several areas of the curriculum.

The advantage of this plan is that it would, perhaps, enable students to achieve a greater range of educational DC objectives as Psychology majors, and reduce the burden of meeting all, or even some, of the objectives within a smaller range of classes (and thus spreading the DC teaching “burden” away from one smaller group of classes).

The disadvantages of this plan are that it could be difficult to create this sort of menu system, and it would be administratively burdensome for students and staff to keep track

of.(e.g., we presently have around 1500 majors, each of whom would have to tracked to see if the DC requirement had been satisfied).

Conclusion

We are unable to provide any more information than the above at the present time, and so no courses are listed etc. for possibly fulfilling the proposed DC requirement. The Department of Psychology, again, requests more time to allow us to try and work this all out.

We must finally note that by comparison to the examples of how DC would work within Language Studies and MCD Biology, the Psychology department and major appears to be far more diverse in terms of the scholarly work we do, the theoretical assumptions motivating the broad range of courses we offer, and the types of educational objectives we value as Psychologists. This is simply a reflection of the nature and history our discipline, for better or worse, and the main reason why we are unable to provide, at this time, a more detailed response to your request.