

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate

FROM: J. Munro
Chair, Senate
Ctee on Academic
Planning

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Curriculum
Revisions - Faculty of Arts -
SCAP Reference: SCAP 90-57

DATE: December 11, 1990

Action undertaken by the Senate Committee on Academic Planning and the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies, gives rise to the following motion:

MOTION: "that Senate approve and recommend approval to the Board of Governors, as set forth in S.91-1 undergraduate curriculum revisions in the Faculty of Arts as follows:

Department of Psychology

- Changes to the program admission requirements for Psychology Minor, Major and Honors students"

MEMORANDUM

To: Jock Munro, Chair of SCAP
Date: November 27, 1990
Topic: Program change in Psychology

Last summer, the Psychology Department requested approval of changes to the program admission requirements for Psychology Minor, Major, and Honors students. In each case, students will be required to achieve a minimum grade point average over the specified lower division courses before being considered for admission.

Minor: Complete PSYC 100, PSYC 102 and PSYC 201 with a minimum grade point average of 2.00

Major: Complete PSYC 100, PSYC 102, PSYC 201 and PSYC 210 with a minimum grade point average of 2.00

Honors: Complete PSYC 100, PSYC 102, PSYC 201 and PSYC 210 with a minimum grade point average of 3.00.

This proposal was approved by FACC on August 2nd, but when it was considered by SCUS at its October 16th meeting it was determined that the GPA limitation constituted an enrolment limitation. SCUS approved the course completion component, but forwarded the GPA limitation proposal to SCEMP for consideration. SCEMP approved the GPA limitation at its meeting of November 21st.

In this process, the arguments for the proposal have been elaborated. To facilitate consideration by subsequent bodies, these arguments are recapitulated here. Since Psychology's main concern is with the change in regulations governing declaration of a major, and since this particular change is the only one with potentially significant enrolment limitation implications, the following arguments focus on Psychology majors.

Completing the Courses Before Declaring Major

It is our experience that many students declare a major in Psychology after taking only a few introductory level courses. We feel that the declaration of major should be a well-informed decision, and in particular that students

should have completed the core content and method courses that define the scope and practice of Psychology.

We have a minimal prerequisite system in Psychology. This acknowledges the obligation we feel to make the discipline maximally accessible consistent with the need for cumulative development of knowledge. We have felt for some years that the balance has tilted too far in the direction of accessibility. However, we have stopped short of recommending, for example, that most or all the lower division requirements be completed before any upper division course is attempted. Although that is common in other programs, Psychology is different in that 48% of our upper division enrollees are not Psychology majors. We feel that many of them would be unwilling to take PSYC 201 and 210 (Research Methods, Data Analysis) in order to gain access to upper division Psychology courses. The effect of adding PSYC 201 and 210 to the prerequisite list on our upper division enrolments (the largest of any department in the University) would be unacceptably disruptive.

Another reason for the proposed change is to encourage Psychology majors to take most of the basic required courses before they take most of their upper division courses. Some students delay the method courses (PSYC 201, 210) too long, in our opinion. We could address this problem by changing our prerequisites, but as noted in the previous paragraph, the effect on enrolments would probably be unacceptably large.

Establishing a Minimum CGPA of 2.00

This part of the proposal is not motivated by the need to reduce our enrolments. Psychology has always shown itself exceptionally ready to shoulder enrolment growth. In fact, between 1982 and 1989 Psychology absorbed 30% of the university-wide increase in course enrolments! Rather, we are concerned that Psychology is becoming responsible for an increasing proportion of the students who are denied entry because of low CGPA to programs with enrolment limitations. This is a difficult trend to track, but 89/90 data show that the proportion of students admitted to a major with a CGPA <2.00 was higher in Psychology (11%) than all but one of the other programs sampled.

Consequences for Enrolments

There will be no obvious changes resulting from the first part of the proposal - to have students take the required courses before declaring the major. The effect will largely be one of reordering their course schedule.

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There would be effects of requiring that these basic courses be completed by would-be majors with a minimum CGPA of 2.00. We have examined some data that suggest what these consequences might be. There are no definitive data, since the first part of the proposal has never been in effect. However, we have looked at two sets of sample data.

First, for students declaring a major in Psychology in 85/86 through 89/90, we noted their CGPAs at the time of declaration. The numbers of such students (percentages in parentheses) over these 5 years are as follows: 31 (12%), 49 (15%), 36 (12%), 32 (10%), 50 (11%). Note, however, that this is based on the student's GPA over all courses, not just the required lower division Psychology courses (some of which had not been taken at the time of declaration).

We also looked at the records of the 53 students who graduated with a Psychology major at the convocation ceremony last month. Records show that 8 of these students had a CGPA less than 2.00 in the required lower division Psychology courses that they took at SFU (some of these requirements were satisfied with transfer courses). This represents some 15% of this admittedly small sample.

These data suggest that implementation of the proposed changes might result in us denying admittance to major of some 10-15% of students currently admitted on first application. We should stress that this figure should not be generalized to our upper division enrolments. As previously noted, almost half our upper division enrollees are not Psychology majors and would be unaffected by the proposed change. Even those denied admission to a Psychology major could continue to take most of our upper division courses.

We conclude that the number of Psychology Majors might drop by 10% if the proposed changes are implemented, but that the drop in our upper division enrolments would be considerably less.

CC: Meredith Kimball, Psychology UGSC
Sheila Roberts, FACC



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