

# Psychology 111: General Psychology

Reflections on and Outcomes of an  
Integrated Learning Experience in  
Introductory Psychology

Jeff Wagman, Dawn McBride, Corinne  
Zimmerman, Dan Graybill, & Val  
Farmer-Dougan

# Why revise traditional format?

- With loss of FOI, the department felt that the first course for our majors should strive to meet many of the *Educating Illinois* objectives that were at one time met in Foundations of Inquiry.
- It was recognized that we couldn't do this for all general psychology students (both the P110 Gen Ed course and P111)
- We decided to focus on our 100+/- entering majors.
- *Specific goals included:*
  - provide a small college feel at a large university (e.g., small classes, accessible faculty, depth and breadth within major)
  - provide incoming students with a course to introduce them to the college experience and build a community among cohorts of psychology majors, and
  - help students become better consumers of information in society through the study of psychology.

# Advantages

- Given that many introductory courses for majors are taught in large lecture formats, we believe that our revised format is an innovative way to foster
  - an integrated learning experience and
  - facilitate a “small class feel” for incoming psychology majors.
- We believe our new format can serve as a model for departments interested in developing an integrated learning experience in introductory, majors only courses.

# Psychology 111

- **Old format**

- 3 credit hours/3 hours contact time/week
- Large classes of 100 to 325 students
- Mostly lecture format
- Little contact with individual faculty
- Little opportunity for discussion/hands on activities
- Generally taught by tenure-line faculty

- **New Format**

- 4 credit hours/4 hours contact time/week
- Small classes of 25-30 students for 3 hours/week
- Large group lecture series one hour each week
- Increased contact with tenure-line faculty
- Increased opportunity for discussion/hands on opportunities
- Taught by tenure line/tenured faculty

# Comparison of format

- **Old format**

- Participation in research was extra credit only
- No assignments tied participation to the course
- Link between “what a psychologist does all day” and the course was not developed
- Little linkage to research at ISU or elsewhere was made

- **New format**

- Participation in research was part of course
- Students were required to critique and evaluate their experiences
- Large lecture supplemented small group work by including presentations by psychology faculty on their actual research
- Laboratory demonstrations were included in both large group and small group meetings

# How did the students like the new format?

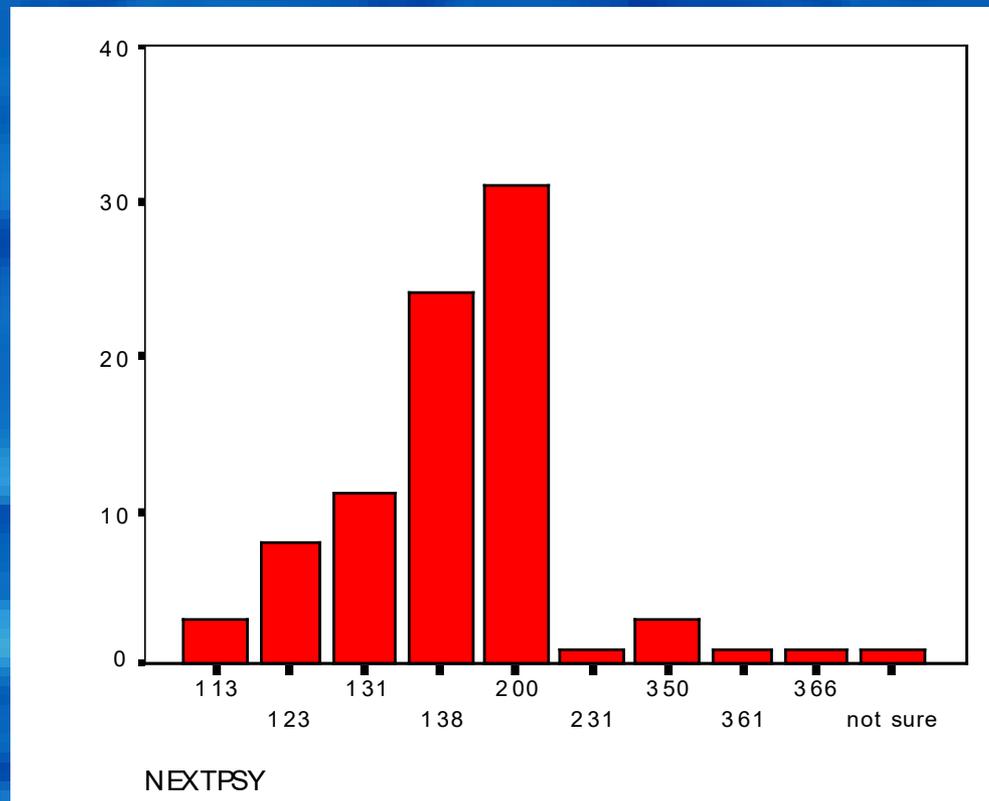
- Students were asked to complete exit survey on last day of class; 59 of 72 completed the survey and both pre- and post-questions regarding “what is a psychologist”
- **PSY 111 End-of-Semester Survey**
  - (1) Which topic covered in the course did you find to be the most interesting?
  - (2) Which topic in the course did you find to be the least interesting?
  - (3) Approximately, how many large group meetings did you attend?
  - (4) Which large group meeting did you like the best? Why?
  - (5) Which large group meeting did you like the least? Why?
  - (6) What is the next PSY course you are likely to take?
  - (7) Are you more likely or less likely to continue to major in PSY as a result of taking this class? Why?
  - (8) This semester was the first time we offered PSY 111 in small sections of roughly 25 students each. Did you like the small class format you had this semester or would you have preferred a larger class (one large section of 75 students)? Why?
  - (9) What grade do you expect to receive in this course?

# Results

- (1) 63% of students reported that *abnormal* was the topic they found most interesting in the course. The 2nd most frequently listed topic in this item was *developmental* with 18.6% of responses.
- (2) 28.8% of students listed biological as the least interesting topic in the course.
- (3) With regard to large group meetings, 76.3% of students reported that they attended 14-15 of the 15 large group meetings during the semester.
- (4) By far, the students most liked the guest speaker who was a patient with schizophrenia. 84.7% listed this as the large group meeting they liked the most.
- (5) 20% of students indicated that they disliked many of the large group meetings..

# Results

- Next PSY class students plan to take

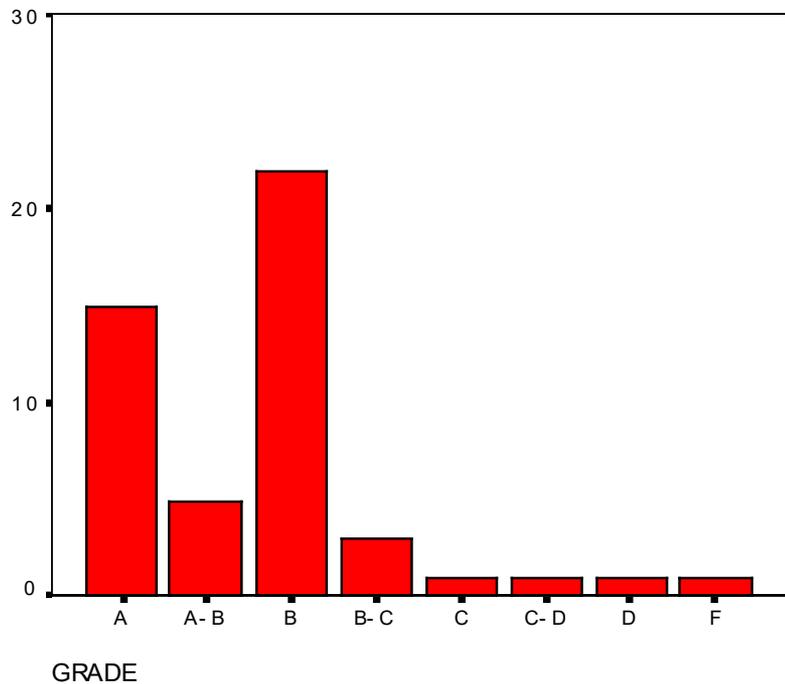


# Results

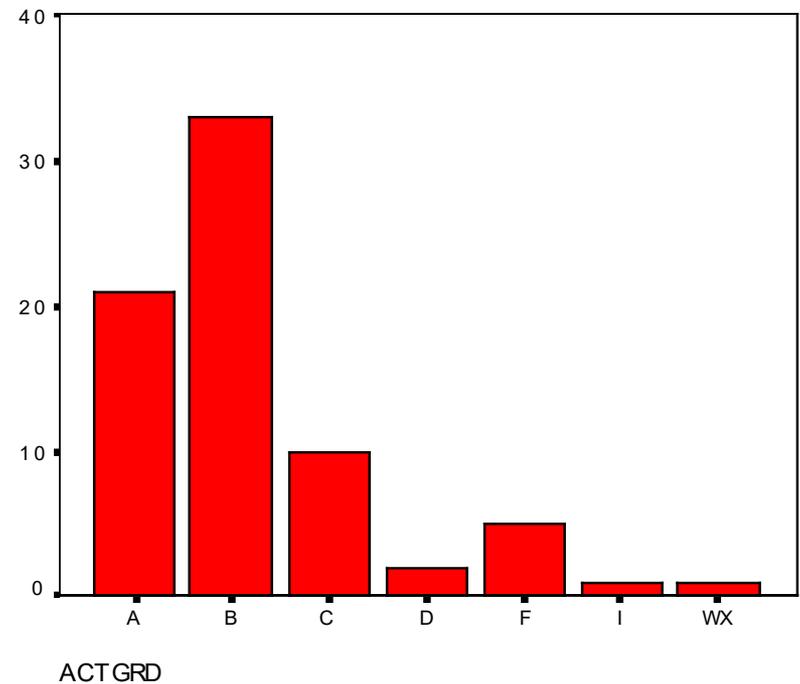
- (7) 78% of students indicated that they are more likely to major in PSY after taking this course.
- Why were they more likely to take another PSY course? Most commonly listed reasons were:
    - Interesting course 30.5%
    - Information about jobs related to PSY 18.6%
    - Course confirmed their interest in PSY 16.9%
    - Preferred the small section size of the course 81.4%
  - Why did students like the class? The most commonly listed reasons were:
    - Better faculty/student interaction 35.6%
    - Better learning environment 22.0%
    - Better opportunity to ask questions 16.9%

# Expected and Actual Grade distribution

- Expected grades:



- Actual grades:



# Sample answers to “What is a psychologist?”

## Pre-course

- (1) A scientist who studies human behavior. A psychologist uses different kinds of research to help different situations and different people.
- (2) There are several fields a psychologist could be most involved with. They could study patients directly and conduct research. Also, there is interpretation of data and research. Also, counseling where they work directly one on one with a patient to help a patient, not necessarily for research and statistical information. In general, psychologists are involved with understanding behavior.
- (3) A psychologist understands how the brain works and why some people do the things they do, act the way they act, and think the way they think. A psychologist also know how to handle many serious issues (such as depression, bipolar, suicide, etc.) and is the person you talk to when you need help with something like that.

## Post-course

- (1) A psychologist is a person who studies human behavior. They don't just study behavior from one point of view. They look at different aspects to try to discover why we act in certain ways
- (2) A psychologist is a person who studies science in relation to the brain, behavior, and environment and the interaction between these things. Using this information, a psychologist may attempt to create new theories or relate the ideas to their practice. This may involve research and studies or working with people or numerical data. There is a broad range of how psychology can be used in different ways.
- (3) A psychologist can be many things depending on what field of psychology he/she is specifically interested in. A developmental psychologist will focus on how we age and the things that affect us as we do so, while, a clinical psychologist will focus more on psychological disorders. Being a psychologist means having an understanding of a certain area of human life, whether it be memory, development, cognition, etc.

# Conclusions

- Students highly preferred smaller sections
- Students were more likely to remain psychology majors; small introductory section seems to make a difference
- Students had a better understanding of the relationship between theory and application; what a psychologist “is”
- Format of large lecture needs to be revised; students had hard time adjusting from small group to large group
- Overall, revision was successful