



# Increasing the work-readiness of Australian Psychology undergraduates through curriculum change

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# Australian undergraduate psychology programs

Are characterised by:

- The integration of teaching and research
- Limited practice-based or service learning

<b>Program</b>	<b>Research-related learning</b>	<b>Practice-based learning</b>	<b>Service Learning</b>
B Psych Science	31.0%	20.2%	0.0%
B Psych Hons	38.5%	17.9%	0.0%

# Psychology: a science and a practice

- The role of the undergraduate program is to provide “*broad foundation knowledge as well as strong skills in research methods, data analysis and report writing*” (Cranney et al, 2008, p. 10)
- Premise is that a grounding in scientific basis at undergraduate levels necessarily precedes professional training at postgraduate levels

1<sup>st</sup> yr

2<sup>nd</sup> yr

3<sup>rd</sup> yr

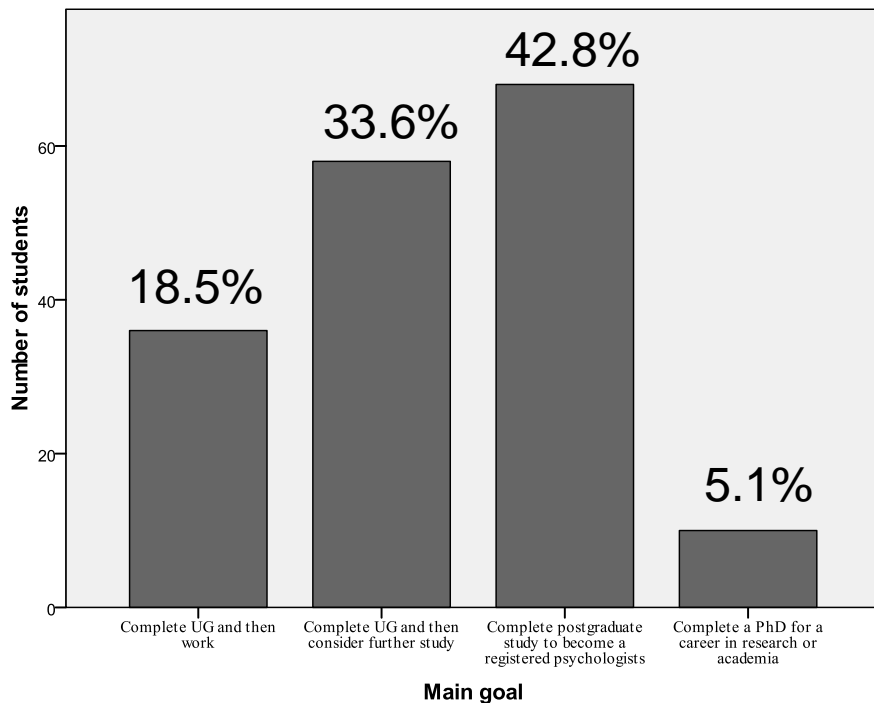
4<sup>th</sup> yr

5<sup>th</sup> yr

6<sup>th</sup> yr

# *“As you start your undergraduate Psychology program, what is your main goal?”*

**195 newly commencing psychology students in 2010 at UniSA**



# At UniSA

- Only 14% enter Honours
- Only 4% enter Masters

Therefore training in psychology under the traditional model is targeted towards the minority

# Student views – CEQ data

## Students' comments (93)

- A greater demand for more workplace learning opportunities
- Improve career prospects if implemented by the start of their 3rd year.

# Drivers and barriers

- Call for an increase for primary mental health skilled workers (COAG, 2006)
- Demands to increase numbers of trained graduates and decrease the length of training (NHWT)
- Training to be responsive and relevant to a changing health system (NHWT)
- Underfunding within universities for curriculum development
- Need to meet accreditation requirements

Year level	Course	
	First semester	Second semester
<b>First year</b>	Psychology IA <b>Counselling Foundations</b> Indigenous Australians: Culture and Colonisation Free Elective	Psychology IB <b>Professional Development: Counselling and Psychology</b> Introductory Research Methods Minor 1
<b>Second year</b>	Developmental Psychology Cognitive Psychology <b>Counselling Skills</b> Minor 2	Biological and Learning Psychology Social and Community Psychology <b>Counselling Interventions</b> Psychology Elective
<b>Third year</b>	Clinical and Abnormal Psychology <b>Psychology Elective</b> Psychology Elective Minor 3	<b>Psychology Elective</b> Elective 1 Elective 2 Minor 4 Note: Students aspiring to Honours in Psychology need to take Advanced Research Methods and Introduction to Psychological Assessment as two of their Psychology Electives at third year.



# First year: Professional Development: Counselling and Psychology

## **Content:**

- Basic professional and academic communication skills,;
- cross-cultural communication;
- ethical practice;
- career management skills- understanding self beliefs, values and learning styles, goal setting, time and project management;
- negotiation and conflict resolution;
- interpersonal skills in personal and professional situations;
- team work in professional practice;
- designing and presenting a seminar;
- designing a personal development plan;
- conducting a personal SWOT analysis.

## **Assessment:**

- Seminar presentation
- Personal learning plan
- Exam

# Student experience – what they liked

- Group/team work and group discussion
- Interactive practicals
- Practical application of skills
- Personal and professional relevance to future goals and careers
- Opportunity for deep reflection
- Self exploration and awareness
- Negotiation and goal setting
- Communication skills

# Student experience – what can be improved

- Student readiness, no clear vision of future goals
- Critical self reflection
- Thinking beyond psychology
- More option for participation, more larger group discussion

# Third year: Psychology Experiential Learning Placement

*Aim: To enable students to enhance their work-readiness by providing opportunities to apply and/or generate psychological knowledge in a workplace context, supported by learning activities that prepare students for the placement and involve critical reflection on the fieldwork experience.*

# “Intended curriculum” Billett, 2011

- Linking psychological theory with practice
- Professional and personal critical reflection
- Awareness of the variety of potential employment

# Psychology Experiential Learning Placement

## Course content:

- Development of a placement learning plan and proposal
- Developing understanding of workplace contexts, values, ethics, professional relationships, accountability, competence, OHSW practices, workplace culture, structure, roles and functions.
- Complete a 50-hour placement by integrating psychological knowledge and practice in a community, industry or research placement.
- Complete a learning journal throughout the placement recording progress and experience.
- Complete a post-placement reflection on the placement learning experience to critically self-reflect and evaluate achievement of learning outcomes.

# The placements

Industry	Area	Skills
Community services	Mental health, Aged care, Family and youth, Indigenous, Career counselling, Employment, Migrant, Disability CALD	Counselling, interviewing, advocacy, support work, mentoring, one-on-one support and care, human resources
Education	Youth, Disability, Unemployment, Indigenous, Migrant	Counselling, behaviour change, engagement in programs, health promotion, mentoring
Government service	Youth, Family, Indigenous, Community, CALD, Counselling, Human resources, Mediation	Conservation behaviour, community environment, interviewing, counselling, advocacy, human resources
Health	Counselling volunteers	Counselling and support service
Overseas service	Community volunteer	Health promotion, advocacy
Research	Research projects, Marketing, Quantitative services, analysis of crime statistics	Research design and proposals, data analysis, statistics, interviewing, focus groups, market research,
Human resources	Introduction to psychological assessment, recruitment and induction	Report writing, desk-top research, assist with psychological assessments under supervision.

# Example placement activities

- Observe and conduct counselling sessions to manage grief and loss
- Provide career counselling and mentoring to secondary students
- Strength assessment and well-being plans for aged care residents
- Contribute to the running of a clinic for psychological therapy
- Work one-on-one with disadvantaged members of the community to help them realise their dreams and aspirations (e.g., help write a story of their life)
- Help design a community program to support young people at risk of homelessness
- Help develop care plans for older people with schizophrenia
- Design and present a workshop on emotional intelligence in the workplace
- Work on a population-based research study about how working conditions are related to stress
- Pilot a new technique for cognitive assessment – transcranial Doppler



# Formal course evaluation - Student experience

- “*The experience was vital for my future*”
- “*It pulled together 3 years of study*”
- It provided “*practical skills*” and career management skills
- It provided an opportunity to “*apply theory to a practical placement*”
- It allowed “*networking with people in the workforce*”

# Formal course evaluation - Student difficulties

- Course considered too much work
- Match between expectations and experience
- Student readiness
- Prior experience with critical reflection
- Aligning theory with placement experience
- Sharing experiences

# Preliminary results of analyses of students' written work

- Course structure forces students to write and reflect on their experiences, and then to reflect on their reflections
- This enables them to identify and consolidate what they have learnt
- The relevance of psychological theory is highly dependent on the nature of the work placement. In some work places psychological content seems of little use

# Preliminary results of analyses of students' written work

- However, generic skills learnt from the course and other components of the degree are extremely useful regardless of the nature of the placement, especially:
- Critical self-reflection, interpersonal communication skills, and awareness of organisational cultural context

# Staff experience

- Ensuring students are prepared for placement when not attending classes
- Clear communication with placement providers
- Managing placement preferences
- Aligning placement hours with other commitments
- Problem solving around students finding own placements

# Key Successes

- The learning offered by placements
- Career skills workshop
- Reflection as a professional skill
- Final seminar including all students, staff and placement providers.

Thank you

Questions?

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