

Department of Psychology

Strategic Plan 2024

Vision

We will continue to improve our standing as one of the nation's leading departments specializing in applied psychological science. Accordingly, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and community, while we concentrate on four strategic goals: (1) Enhance support and recognition for faculty engaged in research and teaching of applied psychological science that aligns with AAU standards (e.g., offer reduced teaching loads). (2) Modernize undergraduate education with new hiring initiatives and revised approaches to training research methods. (3) Grow the scope and size of each of our current Ph.D. programs with emphasis on research that intersects with human health and welfare, so that we are positioned to develop a new clinical psychology Ph.D. program. (4) Address and compensate for institutional constraints by identifying critical barriers and advancing aspirational goals (e.g., establishing a new school of psychological and brain/health sciences).

Mission Statement

The Department of Psychology's mission is to advance the discipline and enhance the application of psychology by contributing original research to the science of psychology; by training future generations of psychological scientists in the skills, knowledge, and ethics of our discipline; and by educating and encouraging undergraduates to take their place as educated, enlightened members of the citizenry. The Department believes that only through scholarly research and high-quality educational programs can a psychology department distinguish itself nationally and bring recognition to itself and to the university. We are further committed to attending to inequities in science and higher education that threaten the validity and integrity of this mission, and that hinder our ability to advance a science that is representative of our increasingly diverse global community.

Background

As of Fall 2024, the Department of Psychology has 19 tenured and tenure-track faculty in Norman and one tenured Professor in Tulsa; seven renewable-term lecturers; 50 graduate students; over 1300 majors and approximately 400 minors; two academic advising staff; and two administrative staff. We offer an MA in Organizational Dynamics at the OU-Tulsa campus. We also have doctoral programs in the following four areas:

1. Cognitive Psychology
2. Industrial/Organizational Psychology
3. Quantitative Psychology and Data Science
4. Applied Social and Developmental Psychology

This combination of doctoral programs, especially the inclusion of the quantitative program, coupled with a unifying applied focus, distinguishes our department from the vast majority of other psychology departments in North America. Our breadth of basic and applied research, combined with our nationally-recognized Quantitative and I/O programs, promotes engagement in discipline-

specific and multi-disciplinary initiatives aimed at understanding and addressing pressing challenges related to human development, health and well-being, human perceptions, biases, and responses to risk in a variety of domains (e.g., climate change, extreme weather, water use, medical decision-making) and rapidly changing technologies, skill needs, human factors, and human dynamics in the world of work. Our faculty and graduate students consistently leverage their skills to participate in interdisciplinary research initiatives, both internally funded (e.g., ICAST-supported projects on AI in the workplace and the effects of play on child development) and externally supported (e.g., through the Center for Applied Social Research, OU Elevate, the Early Childhood Education Institute, the Happy Teacher Project). Psychology faculty also engage closely with other OU faculty as leaders of ICAST-sponsored communities of interest. Psychology had a total of \$1.86 million in extramural funding for AY23-24. This amount is much larger when taking into account projects supported and managed in CASR and ICAST on which our faculty are PIs or Co-PIs. This includes two recent NSF convergence research projects.

Our faculty are also award-winning teachers and mentors. We are the second-highest credit hour-producing department in DFCAS, with over 29,000 credit hours taught in AY24 alone across the Norman and Tulsa campuses. This represents a growth of 13% in credit hour production since AY2019, the third largest increase in DFCAS. Psychology is the second most profitable unit in the College, generating millions of dollars in revenue each year. Our courses are major contributors to the University's educational mission. For example, Elements of Psychology enrolls almost 2,000 students each year for General Education credit. Every pre-health major on campus requires its students to take our Lifespan Development course. Further, we support the statistics education of graduate and undergraduate students from all over campus, enrolling almost 600 students in statistics courses in 2024 alone. Our Quantitative faculty serve as official and unofficial mentors, teachers, and consultants to students *and faculty* from many other departments, including from the Health Sciences, usually with no compensation or credit.

Below, we present four interconnected goals that are crucial to realizing our vision and mission, along with strategies and resources required to achieve them.

Goal 1: Increase departmental alignment with AAU priorities to increase national ranking

The Association of American Universities is comprised of "leading comprehensive research universities distinguished by the breadth and quality of their programs of a) academic research and scholarship, and b) graduate education" and is guided by a set of membership principles as well as measurable indicators by which universities are evaluated for membership. These include:

- Competitively funded federal research support (and expenditures)
- Faculty awards, fellowships, and memberships, including in national academies
- Research volume and quality, including citations of publications
- Book publications
- State- and industry-funded research
- Number of PhDs granted annually
- Undergraduate graduation rate

In accordance with OU's goal of reaching AAU status, Psychology aims to increase research productivity via publications, external funding, and other contributions that raise the research profile of the university, as well as to increase external award recognition for our faculty. Strategies for achieving this goal include:

- **Moving research-active faculty to 2-1 and 1-1 teaching loads to increase dedicated time for research:** Psychology's current standard teaching load is four courses per year (2-2). A recent poll of AAU public departments of Psychology indicates that a 2-1 course load is standard for research-active faculty, and that most departments have a path to 1-1 loads for especially research-active members. A reduction in the standard course load for faculty with active programs of research means more time to devote to all aspects of the research mission, from developing collaborations to writing grant proposals and manuscripts to traveling to academic conferences. This shift will yield gains in external funding, publications, and other products and increase the research profile of the University.
- **Hiring 12 research-active faculty in five years to be more consistent with AAU publics in size:** Though there exists a great deal of variability in faculty size, the average AAU public Psychology department has 54 faculty members (the range is 31-129). This means that OU Psychology, with a total of 27 faculty members, falls below even the smallest AAU public, and is half the size of the average AAU program. Growing our faculty in this way will increase the support for and size of our existing graduate programs and will increase the number of PhDs granted annually. Psychology has typically done well with respect to this AAU metric. Given our enormous undergraduate program and credit hour production, most faculty members, including those who are research-active, carry a teaching burden that prohibits the level of research productivity needed to reach AAU levels. Several faculty members have substantial administrative appointments that further limit research productivity. Recent hiring efforts have prioritized adding teaching-focused colleagues to our ranks in order to bolster our ability to meet our teaching demands; these efforts have made a difference. However, we remain in dire need of additional research-active faculty to increase the research profile of the Department, to support our graduate program and undergraduate mentored research, and to contribute to the teaching and mentoring of our majors and minors.
- **Improving retention of successful research-active faculty members:** It is not enough to hire additional faculty; retention is crucial. Psychology has been fortunate to hire nine tenure-track, research-active faculty members since 2020. However, only four of those colleagues remain at OU as of Spring 2025. Five of six colleagues who were hired between 2020-2022 have left for other institutions or for industry jobs. Clearly, retention is a concern for Psychology. While we realize that it is not easy to address some of the contextual factors that make Oklahoma a challenging place to live and work, the College does have the opportunity to address policies and practices that limit long-term faculty investment in OU. Some of these relate to salary and research infrastructure. For example, the average startup package for new faculty in Psychology has declined since 2020, and we are not competitive with the overall financial offers made by peer universities. The portion of indirect costs we receive from external grants is also poor relative to other institutions. Finally, in order to directly support PIs on the increasing administrative side of proposal writing and grant management, an additional research-dedicated Administrative Coordinator would help new faculty to set up their lab spaces, effectively coordinate research support infrastructure and support with Shared Business Services, and coordinate with the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences grant support team. In short, bolstering financial support and incentives

for research productivity would go a long way toward improving retention of research faculty.

- **Facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations for research-active faculty:** The Psychology faculty overall is already well-integrated into some of OU's research initiatives, including CASR and ICAST, and some are PIs or collaborators on major multidisciplinary research efforts. Increasing participation in OU research institutes, such as the Data Institute for Societal Challenges (DISC), ICAST, and the Native Nations Center, increasing collaborations with the College of Engineering, as well as maximizing opportunities to connect with statewide research infrastructure, such as the Health Promotion Research Center, RainbOK, and OU's emerging partnership with Siemens, will bolster faculty relationships with other researchers and opportunities for productivity. These and other connections will also provide training opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students.
- **Make public commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion:** Departments of Psychology have long led the charge in promoting a commitment to inclusive excellence at colleges and universities. The current national and state-level sociopolitical climate is hostile to many underrepresented groups as well as to attempts to promote any institutional changes to improve diversity and equity. We argue that without a commitment to DEI at all levels, we cannot meet our stated missions related to teaching, research, and service. To this end, we continue to expand our initiatives related to DEI, including:
 - Highlighting our commitment to DEI on our departmental website, social media, and newsletter, including by updating our departmental mission statement;
 - Increasing the participation of underrepresented groups on the Student Advisory Committee;
 - Promoting and broadening DEI committee initiatives such as the Helen Riddle Graduate Student Award for Research on DEI; and
 - Increasing attention to attracting and retaining faculty with research and teaching expertise in DEI-related issues

Pillars of OU's Lead On Strategic Plan with which this goal aligns:

Pillar 1: Become a Top-Tier Public Research University

Pillar 5: Enrich and Positively Impact Oklahoma, the Nation, and the World through Research and Creative Activity

Goal 2: Strengthen excellence in undergraduate education

Providing a rigorous and accessible education in psychological science for the next generation is at the core of our mission. Psychology is one of the most popular undergraduate programs at OU, as evidenced by our steady growth in majors and minors (including during the COVID-19 pandemic, when most programs on campus lost students and saw a reduction in credit hours). Recent efforts to grow our teaching-focused faculty have allowed us to better meet our teaching mission in a variety of ways, including by offering new 4000-level courses that broaden our majors' engagement with psychological science. However, we remain at a critical point with regard to our student-to-faculty ratio and poor funding for undergraduate initiatives that affect many aspects of our undergraduate programs. Strategies to address these issues include:

- Strategically hiring tenure-track research faculty and renewable-term lecturers:** Psychology's undergraduate program has far outgrown this department's ability to meet the many demands of a rigorous major in psychological science that prepares students for post-baccalaureate success. At this point, even our 3000-level classes sometimes exceed 300 students in size. Our majors are limited in the number of 3000- and 4000-level classes available to them each semester, and participation in mentored research experiences—an essential component of preparation for graduate school—is severely constrained by our small number of research-active faculty (i.e., fewer than 20) in relation to our number of majors (about 1400). Additional faculty hires are desperately needed to address these shortfalls so that our majors can graduate in a timely manner and with the solid education and training in psychological science that they expect from their flagship state university.
- Providing funding for undergraduate participation in research and conference travel:** Admission to graduate programs in Psychology is increasingly competitive, with successful applicants to top programs often having a CV that lists multiple national conference presentations and even peer-reviewed publications. Our faculty members involve undergraduates in every aspect of the research process, including presentations and publications, in their efforts to effectively mentor our majors and prepare them for graduate study. However, the Department fields multiple requests every year for research and travel funding for undergraduate students that we simply cannot approve due to budget constraints—meaning those students do not have the opportunity to attend the conferences at which their collaborative work is presented. An increase in Psychology's operating budget would allow us to provide our most promising majors this opportunity to improve their competitiveness for graduate training.
- Redesigning PSY 3114 (Research Methods) to update/modernize lab activities and facilities:** Psychology's Research Methods course is required for all majors and minors and is a foundation of our curriculum. However, the course material and lab activities have not been updated in some time. Further, the classroom facilities in Dale Hall that we use for this course and its lab are in terrible shape, including outdated classroom technology. An increase in our operating budget would allow us to modernize our PSY 3114 curriculum and improve these facilities. We have discussed hiring a dedicated teaching specialist to coordinate the course.

Pillars of OU's Lead On Strategic Plan with which this goal aligns:

Pillar 1: Become a Top-Tier Public Research University

Pillar 2: Prepare Students for a Life of Success, Meaning, Service, and Positive Impact

Goal 3: Improve graduate education, assessment, and outcomes

AAU membership is based in part on the number of PhDs granted by the institution. Our graduate students are at the heart of Psychology, contributing in crucial ways to our teaching and research missions while developing into successful scholars who are competitive on the job market. Accordingly, the health of our graduate program is a top priority. Recent data provided by the Graduate College indicates that Psychology's graduate program metrics are generally quite good. For example, our completion rate (about 77%) and time-to-degree (just over 5 years) are in line with those of the average AAU public program. Our placement outcomes are also good, with most of our PhD graduates obtaining employment that is consistent with their goals. However, our graduate

program has decreased in size over the past few years, which has contributed to our difficulty in meeting our teaching demands and limited the ability of our research-active faculty to be productive. Further, our gradSERU data suggest important barriers to student progress and well-being that need to be addressed. Strategies for improving our graduate program include:

- **Increase qualified applicant pool and graduate enrollment:** Over the past few years, Psychology has seen a decrease in the number of applicants overall, likely due to a combination of factors (e.g., fewer research-active faculty in the department, national trends in graduate enrollment, retirements of nationally recognized faculty members). Further, our ability to attract strong applicants to OU (and to admit them once they have applied) is becoming more challenging. Though the University's efforts to increase graduate student stipends are appreciated, our stipends are still not competitive with those of our peers, and our students struggle financially and take on additional teaching assignments or other jobs to make ends meet. An additional constraint is the fact that all assistantships provided to graduate students are teaching-based—we have zero actual research assistantships, so only students whose faculty mentors have significant grant funding are able to opt out of teaching. This is far out of alignment with AAU standards; it also limits research productivity, worsens burnout, and lengthens time to degree. We have already begun to implement strategies for increasing our recruitment and enrollment efforts (i.e., recruiting strong undergraduates from our own labs; redesigning our departmental website to improve access to key information; developing virtual recruitment efforts to increase our national reach). However, without addressing the financial limitations our students face and without better balancing their research and teaching demands, we will continue to struggle to attract top students.
- **Addressing barriers to student progress and wellbeing:** Recent gradSERU data and student feedback suggest the need for a broader conversation about graduate mentorship, student wellbeing, and how to maximize student success. Some existing mechanisms to support student wellbeing, such as engagement in the Psychology Graduate Student Association (PGSA), are already in place, but are limited in scope due to low levels of funding. In terms of student-mentor relationships, we recognize that faculty mentors come to the department with a variety of mentorship styles and expectations, and that students likewise vary in their need for structure, feedback, and guidance. The Department is currently updating our graduate faculty policy to include some basic expectations for mentorship that can serve as a baseline for guiding new faculty in their role as major professors. In addition, the Department recently implemented a more formal new faculty mentorship program that pairs new faculty members with a senior faculty member in their program area. Mentorship pairs are encouraged to meet regularly and informally during the new faculty member's first year in Psychology, or for longer if desired. Discussions about grad student mentorship are an important part of this process.
- **Updating graduate curriculum to maximize placement outcomes for PhD graduates:** Psychology's placement record for PhD graduates has historically been very strong, due to our rigorous training in basic and applied psychological science and our focus on excellence in Quantitative methods. Efforts are currently underway to modernize our Quantitative Psychology curriculum to better reflect leading-edge approaches to data analytics and to discuss revising the number of required Quant courses for all graduate students in the program. This strategy again highlights our dire need for additional faculty hires; as of Spring 2025, the Quantitative Psychology program will have only two research-active faculty members. As strength in Quantitative methods is truly one of the foundations

of our graduate training, allowing this aspect of the program to continue to operate with so few resources is a threat to the ongoing health of the entire Department.

- **Strengthening and growing the Organizational Dynamics MA program in Tulsa:** ODYN is led by one tenured Professor and a team of Lecturers and adjunct instructors who have kept the program running despite losses of the faculty member who was the former director (due to retirement) staff, and other resources. ODYN is at an inflexion point, as enrollment is down and modifications are needed to modernize the program in order to maintain its appeal to potential students, who have an increasing number of online MA programs available to them. Funds are needed to assist with visibility/recruitment of new students, and at least one tenure-track faculty hire is needed to meet the teaching demands of the program. ODYN also helps to connect OU with industry partners and could potentially connect in some interesting ways with OU's Polytechnic Institute as a Tulsa-based program.

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Pillar 2: Prepare Students for a Life of Success, Meaning, Service, and Positive Impact

Pillar 5: Enrich and Positively Impact Oklahoma, the Nation, and the World through Research and Creative Activity

Aspirational Goal: School of Applied Psychological and Brain Sciences

Psychology is a campus-wide leader in revenue generation and undergraduate majors and current projections indicate that this trend will only continue. Our faculty and graduate students are engaged in interdisciplinary, applied research that attracts external funding and contributes to the prominence of the University. However, our current situation in DFCAS constrains our ability to translate our success into positive, forward-thinking results for Psychology, the University, or the state of Oklahoma.

Our Department's current research themes focus on applied psychology with an emphasis on health-related behavior and outcomes, including physical, mental, and behavioral health. Recent hires (Yaqing He, Michael Sladek) as well as most of our longtime faculty members are engaged in applied research involving some aspect of health and wellbeing, and our current faculty searches seek faculty with research programs that align with this theme. Our research is interdisciplinary, translational, and fundable, as well as relevant to understanding many of the challenges facing the state and the region.

At the same time, we recognize that Psychology has a significant gap in its contribution to the state of Oklahoma: While our Department has a long history at OU, it has been over 50 years since Psychology supported a Clinical Psychology program. This is an extraordinary missed opportunity with significant implications for OU's impact. Oklahoma's mental and physical health are ranked among the lowest in the nation—for example, recent rankings show Oklahoma has the fifth-highest rate of psychological and substance use disorders in the country, yet we rank 33rd in terms of access to mental health care. Oklahoma's flagship public university should have a clinical psychology program that contributes to the solution to these issues. An OU-based Clinical program would provide access to mental health care and assessment to the OU and Norman community, train future generations of mental health care providers, and contribute to OU's research mission. A Clinical Psychology program would also have other benefits to the University, including:

- attracting top-tier researchers with external funding
- making OU more attractive to faculty in other areas of Psychology
- growing our graduate program and attracting top applicants
- broadening our educational and training opportunities for undergraduates
- growing connections among OU units as well as between OU and Health Sciences, TSET, HPRC, etc.

Thus, we propose an aspirational goal, but one we believe is realistic and attainable: A School of Applied Psychological and Brain Sciences. This unit would house all current Psychology graduate programs, as well as a new Clinical Psychology program and an enhanced focus on Health Psychology that provides a throughline connecting our graduate programs. This goal would require considerable time, planning, and resources, including a substantial investment by the University, external donors, and extensive additional space. Psychology is prepared to take on this challenge. We look forward to beginning the conversation.
