

Evaluating Outcomes of a Professional Development Sequence

RaLynn C. Schmalzried, Ph.D.

Purpose:

The purpose of this experiment is to assess the learning goals of the Professional Development sequence in Psychology – PSYC 200 and PSYC 300 and evaluate what is being learned in this sequence and obtain student perceptions of the usefulness of the sequence

Method:

Quantitative Data Obtained:

Students agreeing to participate completed a 29-item questionnaire centered around career preparedness and professional development at the beginning and end of Fall 2013 semester.

- 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
- Pre and post-test given in each class
- 13 of 14 in PSYC 300 and 27 of 35 in PSYC 200 consented to participate
- Surveys completed during class without instructor present

Qualitative Data Obtained:

- 4 open-ended questions administered via D2L as anonymous survey throughout semester
- Students completed on own time

Questions:

1. Today or in the future, how would you go about finding answers to questions you have regarding career preparation or psychology-related topics?
2. Today, how prepared do you feel to find a job after graduation? What questions do you have? What are you most confident about and what are your biggest concerns?
3. Explain your process of discovering career fields that interest you. What process did you take to find out about these and what resources are you aware of to learn more about this field/job?
4. What specific assignments or experiences in college have you had that have helped you prepare for a career? Specifically, how did those assignments help you in your professional development?

“Working well with others, taking a lead in groups, using critical thinking, problem solving, meeting deadlines, keeping priorities in line, managing my time wisely, being observant, decision making, social skills, and being able to communicate my ideas – these are all things that now I realize will be necessary in a career and hadn’t directly thought about before.”

~PSYC 200 student

Qualitative Themes – PSYC 200

Recognition of skills transferring from classroom to workplace

Increased options lead to confusion

“I feel confident that there are so many career options in the field of psychology, but I also feel overwhelmed at the same time...”

Increased options deepen commitment

“I already came in to the class with a field in mind. The course helped to strengthen that resolve by confirming that I do fit the profile for the job and am most interested in that material compared to other areas”

Internet is the main source for job-related information

Qualitative Themes – PSYC 300

Focus on Future and Graduate School

Refer to PSYC 200 for what helped discover career fields

Refer to analysis and application of scientific articles for what experiences have prepared them

Refer to PSYC 300 assignments – mock interviews, resume and personal statement for how confident they feel when applying to jobs or graduate school

Recognition of resources such as LinkedIn, professional society webpages, career services, textbook, and professors rather than simple Internet search to find answers to questions regarding careers

Preliminary Quantitative Measures

PSYC 200: 27 completed pre survey (2 thrown out), 19 completed post surveys (1 thrown out)

PSYC 300: 13 completed pre survey, 10 completed post survey

100% of PSYC 300 students felt “very positive” toward being a psychology major at post-survey

PSYC 300 students indicated higher rate of confidence in being prepared to apply for graduate school and to find/apply for a job after graduation

Challenges/Lessons

- Informed Consent confusion – more completed surveys in PSYC 200 than signed consents → re-do surveys and lesson on research ethics
- Open-ended qualitative questions low adherence rate – no accountability
- Didn’t have students identify pre-tests so no way to tell changes at individual level
- Fewer post-surveys completed

Future Work

- Continue to assess learning in these courses, addressing the challenges above
- Work with admissions and University to examine if there is a link between professional development and retention
- Re-design the survey to include more questions regarding career preparation and more open-ended questions in survey

Acknowledgements

Thank you to UW-Superior Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for summer grant to help support this research and to the student participants.

Also, thank you to other fellow CETL Summer SoTL participants for your ideas, encouragement, and feedback regarding this project.

References

Dillinger, R.J. & Landrum, R. E. (2002). An information course for the beginning psychology major. *Teaching of Psychology, 29*, 230-248.

