Proposed Capstone Experience in Psychology

Psychology majors will be offered a "menu" of options for completing a capstone experience in their final year (the two semesters and summer prior to graduation). All the options will be reviewed and approved by the Undergraduate Training Committee, of which the Capstone Coordinator is a permanent member. Included in the Appendix are proposals for capstones (including Directed Studies, Teaching Practica and Course Enrichments; see below) that have already been submitted by some of our faculty members; although they are not exactly in the format we will use in the future for faculty proposals to establish a capstone experience, they provide a good idea of what we will offer. Students will select an appropriate option in consultation with their adviser prior to their final year. The options to be offered include:

- **PSYC 491, Field Experience in Psychology.** Students in this program receive a part-time or full-time placement with a community agency. Agencies include those that provide services to individuals with mental, behavioral, and physical disorders and those that provide educational and consulting services. Placements may be in Morgantown or elsewhere (particularly in the Summer). Students are supervised on-site by licensed psychologists or similar professionals. Students also complete readings and write papers related to their experience. The PSYC 491 program is coordinated by a Psychology Department faculty member.

- **PSYC 498, Honors Investigation and Thesis.** Students with a grade point average of 3.4 and above may complete an independent research project and write a Thesis under the direction of a faculty member.

- **PSYC 492, Directed Studies.** Students may participate in Directed Studies courses that have been approved as capstone experiences by the Department's Undergraduate Training Committee. Such courses might include individual or team research projects, individual and group readings and discussions, applied projects such as community service or clinical work, and such activities as attending conferences, studying abroad, or field trips.

- **PSYC 490, Teaching Practicum.** Students may participate in Teaching Practica that have been approved as capstone experiences by the Department’s
Undergraduate Training Committee. Such practica might include readings on the teaching of psychology and participation in a variety of teaching-related activities.

- **Advanced Course Enrichments.** Students may participate in enrichment experiences offered in conjunction with advanced (current 200-level) psychology courses. These course enrichments will be available to small groups of seniors concurrently enrolled in the course. Sample enrichment experiences include labs, research projects, service projects, extra readings and discussion, observations of natural behavior, and field trips.

**PSYC 401: The Psychology Capstone Experience course**

The Psychology Capstone Experience will require a total of 4 credits. Students will enroll for 3 credits of the appropriate course (PSYC 491, 498, 492, 490, or a capstone-enriched 200-level course). In addition to those activities required of the 3-credit course, all students completing their capstone experience will participate in the following activities as part of a 1-credit capstone course (the proposal for which is included in Appendix):

- **During class periods:**
  1. Information regarding capstone activities will be distributed.
  2. Concerns of students regarding their capstones will be addressed.
  3. Students will update Instructor on their capstone experience.
  4. Instructions will be provided for completing and presenting posters summarizing the capstone experience.

- **Present a poster summarizing their capstone experience.** A poster session will be held at the end of each Fall and Spring semester. Students completing a capstone in the Summer will present a poster at the Fall session. All department faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and appropriate university administrators will be invited to attend. Abstracts of all posters will be posted on a Psychology Capstone Experience web site.

- **Take the Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT) in Psychology.** The ACT is a standardized assessment of knowledge in psychology. Results will allow us to compare the learning outcomes of our undergraduates with those at other schools. Performance on the ACAT will not constitute part of the student's grade for the capstone course.

- **Complete evaluation materials.** All students will complete a graduating senior survey that asks students about their satisfaction with our program. Students will also evaluate the capstone experience so that we may continually refine and improve it.

**Guidelines for Capstone Experiences**

All capstone experiences must be approved by the Undergraduate Training Committee. The Capstone co-ordinator will serve as a member of that committee. The following guidelines will be used to assist faculty members in developing capstone experiences:
• Capstone experiences will expand on and integrate skills and knowledge students have acquired in their courses.
• Capstone experiences must require active learning, acquisition of information, and demonstration of critical thinking.
• Capstone experiences will require writing. In many cases, students may receive writing course credit for the capstone experience (i.e., the capstone experience will be part of an approved writing course).
• Capstone experiences will require students to consider ethical and/or societal issues that are involved in their activities.
• Capstone experiences will require 4 credits worth of student time and effort.
• Capstone experiences will include regular meetings with the faculty members that offer the capstone. Meetings may be group or individual, and the frequency may differ across varied types of capstone experiences, as approved by the Undergraduate Training Committee.
• Capstone experiences may not be taught by graduate students, although graduate students may play a role in supervision, particularly in research projects (e.g., under PSYC 492 or PSYC 498).
• Students will take the Psychology Capstone Experience course during the semester in which they participate in their capstone experience (or in the fall semester for summer capstone students).

Curriculum Changes Requested

In order to implement our capstone program, two changes in the Psychology curriculum are required:

1: Increase the number of credits required for a Psychology major by one, from 32 to 33.
2: This increase in credits will allow us to add a course to be required of seniors, entitled "Psychology Capstone Experience," to our curriculum.

In practice, completion of the capstone experience should require a small increment (equal to approximately 1 credit) in the total workload for psychology majors. This is because the activities that will count as capstones are largely those activities that our majors engage in anyway. One-third to 1/2 of our students take advantage of PSYC 490, PSYC 491, PSYC 492, or PSYC 498 during their senior years, and of course all of our majors take advanced (200-level) Courses. Thus, we view the capstone experience as a 1-credit increase in our students' effort. That 1-credit's worth of effort, which is incorporated into the capstone experience itself and the Psychology Capstone Experience course, is designed to meet the goals for capstone experiences expressed in the definition quoted earlier.

In addition, the capstone experience (3+1 credits) may replace one required elective. Currently, students take a core set of courses, plus a selected 200-level experimental course and four additional 200-level courses (one of which can be replaced by a 100-level course) of the student's choosing. No change in these requirements is needed for students who select a course enrichment as their capstone experience.
Students who select Field Experience, Honors Thesis, Directed Study, or Teaching Practicum as their capstone experience will be allowed to count 3 credits of that course as a replacement for one of the four required electives.