1. Learning goals assessed in AY 2009-2010.
In AY 2009-2010 the Department of Psychology assessed our student’s analytic, communication and explanatory skills as delineated in our 2005-2006 Self Study. In our Assessment Plan outlined in the 2005-2006 Self Study we identified several content centered learning objectives at the program level. This last academic year we assessed our student’s “Analytic and Communication ... Skills”, as well as their ability to explain behavior, cognition and emotion in both psychological and theoretical terms.

2. Methods used to assess the above learning goals and findings.
This year we addressed written communication skills in particular. We did this by assessing the final paper required of students in our capstone course, “Controversial Issues in Psychology.” This assignment is a five page paper on a topic considered to be controversial in the field of Psychology. Fifteen papers were randomly selected and assessed by a committee consisting of the Department Chair, Bruce Behrman, and Professors Larry Meyers and Kelly Cotter. The papers were evaluated according to American Association of Universities and Colleges LEAP format, in particular the Written Communication Value Rubric (see Attachment). The basic learning objective categories evaluated for the papers as designated in the Value Rubric are as follows: “Context of and Purpose for Writing”, “Content Development”, “Genre and Disciplinary Conventions,” “Sources and Evidence” and “Control of Syntax and Mechanics”. Each category was evaluated on a four point scale: “Benchmark” 1 point, “Milestones”, 2 or 3 points, and, “Capstone”, 4 points, where the scale essentially ranges from adequate or barely adequate (1) to excellent (4).

Psych 107, Controversial Issues in Psychology is a capstone course in Psychology. The emphasis is on critical analysis of issues and the presentation of arguments on both sides of controversial issues. The general format of the class is a discussion /debate format. Satisfactory completion of Psych 8, a lower division methods course and Psych 101 an upper division methods course are required for admission. Thus the class consists primarily of first semester or graduating seniors. In this course students are expected to:

1. “Identify argument structure in Psychological controversies.”

2. “Evaluate the argument once it has been identified by applying rules of logic to evidence and identifying the validity of evidence”

3. “Stating verbally and/or in writing your own position by stating the position and presenting support for the position.”

The final paper was to be on a topic considered to be controversial in the field of Psychology e.g. controversies concerning attention deficit hyper-activity disorder, compulsory treatment of anorexia nervosa, freedom of marriage for homosexual couples and controversies concerning sexual addiction. The paper was to be a discussion of the issues based on research in the field.
The students were to use APA format and style. Each member of the assessment committee independently rated the papers on each learning objective in the value rubric. The Committee then discussed their ratings in those instances wherein substantial disagreement occurred. Reliability statistics were computed on the post-discussion ratings. We computed the intraclass correlations for each of the learning objective scales; these ranged from .694 to .913. The mean rating for each of the learning objectives were as follows, Purpose, 3.06; Genre and Disciplinary Conventions, 2.84; Content Development, 2.60; Evidence, 2.60, Syntax, 2.73.

Milestone level 3 was attained for Purpose. This indicates that the students demonstrated adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s). A high degree of Milestone level 2 was attained for Content Development which indicates that the students used appropriate content to develop their ideas. A score of 2.48 was attained for Genre. We evaluated this category in terms of student's use of APA format. Thus it appears as if our seniors may need more instruction in APA format and style than they are presently getting. A score of 2.84 for Sources and Evidence indicates that our students for the most part did in fact attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support their ideas. Finally, a score of 2.73 on Syntax indicates that our students generally conveyed their ideas in a straightforward way and with considerable clarity.

3. Anticipated Program Changes.
The Assessment Committee agrees that, based on the present evidence, our seniors have attained a level of writing ability appropriate for undergraduate seniors when judged according to the AACU criteria. These findings will be presented to the Department Curriculum Committee. However, even in light of these positive findings, we do recommend that the Curriculum Committee discuss ways of providing additional instruction in writing according the APA format.

It should be noted that our findings are based on a comparatively small sample of papers. We intend to evaluate an additional set of papers from our capstone course, Controversial Issues in Psychology, during the next academic year.

4. Other Assessment Activities and Future Assessment Activities.
The Department Curriculum Committee is now in the process of considering the adoption of the AACU learning objectives as part of the Department's present learning goals. The AACU value rubrics will be discussed from the perspective of the Department's unique curricular needs.