Educational Objectives in the Psychology Major
Revised March 2015

The 21st Century world is projected to feature themes involving limited resources, rapid technological changes, and an increasingly cosmopolitan social environment. What will our students need from a liberal education at St. Lawrence University to enhance their personal development as they move through that world, and what can psychology contribute?

Rather than attempting to assimilate encyclopedic knowledge, applicable at best to only a narrow range of circumstances, students need to cultivate the habit of lifelong learning in response to life’s changing demands and goals. In psychology this involves the development of disciplinary competence as reflected in the acquisition, interpretation, expression, and application of knowledge and skills. Psychology is well-suited to address program-specific learning goals which involve the intersection of information literacy, the methods of science, and cognitive skills with the disciplinary content of psychology. Regardless of specific courses, we expect all psychology majors to be able to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information related to psychology.

Our measurable goals include:

- **Information literacy and communication**
  - Effectively communicate psychological content and arguments
    - Display the ability to sensitively target various audiences
    - Use various media (incorporating technology as needed)
    - Use multiple modalities (e.g., visual, oral, written)
    - Display ethical compliance with copyright laws and academic honesty

One central theme is the communication of observations and inferences to other interested parties through written, oral, and visual communication. A second goal objective is to develop our student’s ability to make use of a spectrum of information sources, and to thoughtfully evaluate their quality and utility.

- **Disciplinary methods**
  - Understand and utilize the scientific method with regards to understanding mental processes and behavior
    - Generate research questions and hypotheses
    - Acquire data
    - Analyze results and interpret
    - Create new research questions and hypotheses that build on current knowledge
  - Display adequate mastery of the American Psychological Association’s approach to scholarly research, writing, and presentation guidelines
  - Display a deep appreciation for the ethical treatment of human participants and animal subjects in research projects

What is common to the various approaches to psychology is that they are grounded in the methods of science, the systematic empirical observation of the world, the subsequent
interpretation and generalization of observations to other times and places based on deductive and inductive inference and, finally, the communication of observations and inferences to other interested parties.

- **Cognitive skills**
  - Deduce, synthesize, quantify, and evaluate psychological content
  - Process and apply psychological content to novel problems and settings
  - Display the ability to make informed, original (personal) interpretations and judgments about information consumed

The content of psychology provides a vehicle to teach students fundamental, lifelong, broadly applicable learning processes, while the processes provide the cognitive and technological tools to investigate the discipline’s contents.

- **Disciplinary content**
  - Acquire and use multiple perspectives (e.g., biological, cognitive, social) to understand mental processes and behavior from various levels of analysis

The disciplinary content of psychology is very broad: the study of mental processes and behavior. These topics are diversified even further in a curriculum that targets various subfields of psychology (for example, physiological, social, clinical or environmental psychology) and different levels of analysis (for example, neural, behavioral, or sociocultural analysis.)