

Psychology Department Proposal for Compensation for Additional Teaching Activities A: Compensation for Supervised and Independent Research Courses

08/16/07

Brief History: The Department of Psychology approved a general plan on 10/04/06 for compensation for currently uncompensated teaching activities including both (a) supervised and independent research courses, and (b) 4-credit lab courses. The proposed plan is consistent with the recommendations by the Ad Hoc Faculty Equity Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences dated May 27, 2004. The plan has been discussed at meetings of the Science chairs and the Arts & Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum Committee throughout the Winter and Spring 2007 semester. In June 2007, Dean Snyder expressed a need to separate the two components into individual proposals and to strengthen the arguments. The A&SCC has on its agenda for Fall 2007 development of standards for equity in compensation for internships and supervised and independent research courses.

Rationale: Fairfield University prides itself on its ability to provide a variety of opportunities for students to work closely with faculty members on scholarly pursuits outside the traditional classroom, including internships, teaching practicums, and research. In psychology, student involvement in research as part of their undergraduate education serves many valuable functions. Compared to students who are not involved in research, undergraduates who engage in psychological research not only are more competitive for graduate school admissions and for the job market, but they have a better fundamental understanding of their discipline, are more educated consumers of research claims, report greater enhancement of their general education and personal development, and score higher on measures of critical thinking and independent thinking skills (Kierniesky, 2005). Written and oral communication skills are better developed in student researchers compared to nonresearchers, as is the ability to identify focused questions and research hypotheses for scientific scrutiny and the use of appropriate statistical analyses for drawing conclusions (Kardash, 2000). Furthermore, psychology majors who work with faculty on research have been shown to be more engaged in, challenged by, and satisfied with their educational experiences (Elmes, 2002). In recognition of research experience as an invaluable part of the education of our psychology majors, we offer two elective courses beyond the required two-semester sequence of statistics and research methods. Students enroll in these additional courses for credit: Supervised Research (PY 298; 3 credits) and Independent Research (PY 398; 4 credits).

The independent research course is one in which an individual student develops an original research project, which they conduct with consultation and feedback from a faculty mentor. The expectation is that students design, run, analyze, and report a study from start to finish. The supervised research course is different in its intent and spirit. It serves two main purposes. One is to provide a wider range of students with research experience by allowing small teams of students to work closely with a faculty mentor on projects that the mentor is conducting as part of their research program. The other major purpose is to provide necessary research skills for students who chose to go on to develop an independent research project.

The members of the psychology department feel very strongly about ensuring that the supervised research course provides meaningful and worthwhile educational experiences for the students (rather than simply provide a “work force” for faculty to move their own research programs along). As such, there are common expectations and requirements for the course. Students typically meet weekly for lab meetings, with several other one-on-one meetings with the faculty mentor throughout the semester. Students are expected to engage in research-related activities for 10 hours per week. The activities vary depending on the nature of the projects, and can include testing subjects, developing materials for use in studies, assisting in design of projects, data analysis, and library research. Research articles and other relevant readings are discussed and written summaries are required. In addition, all students must submit a research paper (e.g., a research proposal, a literature review). Depending on the nature of the research, some students keep a journal documenting their ongoing learning experiences and some design and present a poster for the yearly Sigma Xi poster session here at Fairfield. Others have become co-authors or primary authors on papers and posters presented at regional, national, and international professional conferences.

Although students enroll in both supervised and independent research for credit, faculty members currently receive no compensation for teaching these courses. We recognize that many of the activities faculty engage in are indeed “part of the job” or are things we do simply because we enjoy doing them and believe them to be worthwhile. Some of these activities have more immediate and direct benefits for the faculty members and hence are less in need of compensation. For instance, we routinely offer a “Teaching Internship in Psychology” course (PY 296/297, 3 credits) in which student interns work closely with individual faculty in teaching a particular course to learn pedagogy and see psychological principles at play in learning. However, because of the time-consuming, labor-intensive nature of the research activities and the fact that they do not necessarily result in other more tangible rewards (e.g., conference presentations, publications), we propose the following “banking system” such that faculty members can accrue credit for their research activities involving students.

Other schools have been more progressive than Fairfield University in providing compensation for research activities involving students. A May 2003 survey by the Council on Undergraduate Research and an informal survey by Linda Henkel in January 2007 posted on the Council on Undergraduate Research discussion board found that the number of schools having some form of compensation is growing. The May 2003 survey showed 9 of the 29 schools (23%) had some form of compensation, and the January 2007 survey found that 11 of the 19 schools did (58%). The nature of the compensation plans varied. The most direct method is where faculty actively engaged in student-oriented research either have a permanent reduced teaching load or apply periodically for a temporary reduced teaching load. Another popular method is a banking system in which points are accrued towards a course reduction. Other methods include one in which a low-enrollment research course is counted directly as part of the teaching load for that semester or a future semester, in house grants for a course reduction, or a stipend for student research activities.

The Fairfield Psychology Department plan has chosen a banking system as the most viable plan for our department. Because students take the research courses for credit, this plan serves as an adjustment to our curriculum in that it reallocates where faculty spend their time teaching,

whether it be in a traditional classroom setting or in a hands-on laboratory research setting. This plan allows active researchers to accrue points for the research courses that students enroll in for credit and use those points for a periodic course reduction. Caps on the number of students and number of course reductions allowed to count per year ensure that the plan maximizes our use of available resources without increasing reliance on adjuncts. While this plan may serve as a model for other departments, individual department needs and resources may require other forms of compensation rather than a banking system.

Proposed Plan for Compensation for Supervised and Independent Research Courses

1. A typical seminar consists of 15 students. We therefore propose a banking system where a faculty member who has accrued 15 units is eligible for one 3-credit course reduction. Typically each student taking supervised research will count as one unit and students taking independent research will count as two units. However, because the nature of the research and the amount of time required of faculty vary from project to project (e.g., some supervised research requires extensive training in techniques and testing procedures in which the students need to be monitored very intensively by their faculty supervisor), the number of units will be determined by a subcommittee of the psychology department at the last department meeting of each academic year. This yearly review will provide an opportunity to maintain the spirit of the supervised research course as an educational experience for students and will facilitate greater communication amongst the members of the psychology department in terms of our research activities.
2. No one may claim credit for student research that is part of the regular teaching load or for which monetary compensation (e.g., course overload) is received (e.g., a faculty member running an advanced research seminar as part of his or her teaching load cannot claim credit for bankable units as well; a faculty member who has received a course reduction via a grant for student-based research cannot count those student researchers as separate bankable units).
3. A record of accumulated and “cashed in” credits will be maintained by individual faculty members on a standardized form and submitted to the Chair, as will the yearly summary of students involved in research presented to the department for determination of number of units. Requests for a course reduction must be made to the chair of the department by December 6th in order to meet the December 20th deadline established by the Dean for approval of course reductions for the next academic year.
4. To ensure the integrity of the psychology curriculum and that the needs of the department are being met, during the semester when a faculty member takes a course reduction for accrued research units, that faculty member’s other courses should meet departmental needs (e.g., the more basic psychology courses rather than smaller, upper division courses or senior seminars should be offered; all other courses should be in the psychology department, rather than part of the honors program, Ignatian Residential College, or some other academic program). In addition, it is expected that faculty will take no more than one course reduction per semester for banked research units. Faculty members may need to defer a course reduction when department needs arise (e.g., when other members are out on sabbatical or medical leaves).

5. The banking system is intended to provide faculty with release time to compensate them for their research activities with students. Therefore, no one may be paid an overload for another course during a semester when he or she is taking a course reduction. Faculty members should not proliferate supervision of individual students for the sake of building up banking accounts. Therefore, no faculty member may claim more than 20 units in a given year.

6. Credits for the banking system will begin accruing beginning with the Fall 2007 semester.

We estimate that over the next 5 years, this plan would likely result in 8 course reductions across the 9 full time faculty members. Given that students take these courses for credit, this will not result in an increased need for other courses.