COGDOP Response to Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology*  
(*Revised January 2010)

The Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology (COGDOP) commends the American Psychological Association for its development and support of the National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology (NCUEP), especially Dr. Diane Halpern’s leadership of it, from which was produced the Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology. COGDOP is especially grateful for being invited to participate in the NCUEP, and for its representative being appointed to the NCUEP Steering Committee. We also appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed principles**.

COGDOP generally endorses the Principles emerging from the NCUEP albeit we take issue with a few of the suggested recommendations that follow from some of the principles. Several of the Principles are firmly grounded in COGDOP members’ guiding assumptions regarding undergraduate education, including:

Quality Principle 1, Students are Responsible for Monitoring and Enhancing Their Own Learning; Quality Principle 3, Psychology Departments and Programs Create a Coherent Curriculum; and Quality Principle 4, Academic Administrators Support and Encourage Quality Practices in Teaching and Learning. (Some members expressed concern that this principle should be expanded to take into account the science of pedagogy regarding class size when administrative decisions are made about resource allocations.)

COGDOP also is encouraged by the emergence of two innovative Principles that may advance how we conceptualize undergraduate education; namely,

Quality Principle 2, Faculty Strive to Become Scientist-Educators who are Knowledgeable About and Use the Principles of the Science of Learning and Quality Principle 5, Policymakers and the General Public Understand Why Psychological Literacy is Necessary for Informed Citizens and an Effective Workforce.

As the group responsible for overseeing the quality of education in psychology for a substantial proportion of the nation’s psychology majors, we wish to respond to these important matters.

COGDOP endorses the principles of academic freedom, especially those incorporating shared governance, and so opposes curricular prescriptions in the absence of empirical evidence or clear consensus by academic psychology. However, we do wish to support the importance of programs grounded in foundational psychological science. Thus, we strongly endorse Quality Principle 3, Recommendation 1, that the scientific underpinnings of psychology should be reinforced throughout the curriculum.
Propositions deriving from the Principles also should be based on scientific evidence to the extent possible, with reference to relevant findings in their support. In the absence of specific scientific evidence, programs should articulate the pedagogical basis for their program(s) in relation to the mission and goals of the program. Thus, for example, Quality Principle 3, Recommendation 6 states that courses should be sequenced in ways that are developmentally appropriate. While a program may choose to implement a curriculum in which statistics and research methods are taken in the second semester of the first year, the scientific literature on the developmental appropriateness of this sequencing is not clearcut. This also holds for recommendation 3 regarding the four content domains of undergraduate psychology curricula suggested as biological bases, life-span development, learning/cognition, and sociocultural influences. We agree that foundational knowledge is important, and sequential training useful, however, the mandate of one particular sequence or the exclusion of other important areas (e.g., abnormal and/or clinical psychology) is problematic. Absent data to support a particular sequence or these four particular areas at the exclusion of others, we find the recommendation to be overly prescriptive and without empirical basis. Nevertheless, we support the value of a sequenced curriculum that provides and builds on foundational knowledge. We believe that programs should be asked to address the ways in which their programs provide coherent, scientifically valid (where possible) sequences and to justify their choices of foundational areas to assure relevant breadth and depth of learning.

While in spirit COGDOP endorses Quality Principle 3, Recommendation 4, that the psychology major might be strengthened by including an applied experience, we are not convinced that it must include an applied experience. Implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and fiscally supporting applied experiences for ALL majors is simply beyond the resources (local, staff and dollar) of many, if not most, departments. In general, the quality principles should not represent unfunded mandates for departments, but should instead offer recommendations with which departments can work in myriad ways that respect the mission and goals of the program without creating undue financial burden or legal liability. Thus, we would endorse a statement about the value of applied experiences but we suggest that such opportunities be very broadly defined and framed as a recommendation not requirement.

Finally, we note that quality Principle 3, Recommendation 8 rests on two propositions: 1) that graduate instruction in teaching is needed by all graduate students, whether or not they intend to become academic psychologists, and 2) that mentoring relationships are insufficient for teaching graduate students about the “science and art of teaching.” The appropriateness of a graduate teaching curriculum should be determined by individual programs to insure coherence with the training mission and philosophy. Programs with training missions that espouse preparation for academic careers may very well wish to allocate resources toward teacher preparation. In contrast, programs with training missions focused on
preparing scientists or nonteaching practitioners may wish to allocate those resources in other directions. Again, by virtue of its endorsement of academic freedom and shared governance, COGDOP believes that programs should set forth their own mission(s) and goals, and design their curricula accordingly. Thus, we are unable to support this recommendation.

It is our hope that these guidelines, if adopted, will be subject to scrutiny and assessment to determine if indeed they contribute to enhancement of quality education and not merely bureaucratic structures. We advocate for an evaluation process aimed at assessing the effectiveness of such principles in promoting and building a quality educational experience for students of the profession.

**Drafted and finalized by the COGDOP Board with input from the membership 5/20/2010**