LARC 2.0 Inquiry-Based Course Innovation Proposal

PARTICIPANT/DEPARTMENT

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Psychology

CURRICULUM INNOVATION TYPE

Inquiry-based module

COURSE

Clinical Psychology

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION / GOALS

If funded, this grant will support the creation of a new module for inquiry-based learning in my Clinical Psychology course. The course consists of an overview of contemporary topics/controversies in the field, a review of four distinct theoretical orientations to the provision of psychotherapy, and a project wherein students summarize the rationale and efficacy for a specific intervention (e.g., mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for major depression). The proposed grant is aimed at expanding and refining this third component of the course. By the end of the course, students should have knowledge of how psychologists treat psychological disorders, be able to compare and contrast major theoretical orientations toward therapy, and think critically about how to assess and improve the effectiveness of existing treatments.

Clinical psychology is a common interest among psychology majors, typically with the aim of becoming a professional therapist. Importantly, students are likely to register for this course even if they feel an aversion to “hard science” like that found in Biological Psychology. This misconception that clinical psychology is less scientific than other subfields of psychology (or other sciences) provides an opportunity to reach students who might not otherwise seek out the chance to interact directly with the scientific literature.

While this opportunity is exciting, it can also be challenging for many students. Individuals who have received therapy can experience difficulty seeing past their personal experiences to objectively evaluate different methods of treatment. More generally, it can be uncomfortable for students to acknowledge that important questions surrounding the treatment of mental illness often have answers that differ from one’s original intuition. The proposed inquiry-based module is meant to provide a structure to guide students in this transition to becoming informed and critical consumers of science in this field. It will take the form of a series of activities that progress from Discovery of Scholarship to Scholarly Inquiry.

In the first set of activities, which takes place in the first third of the course, students will be provided with a series of pre-selected articles that summarize basic concepts in clinical research (e.g., randomized controlled trials). Small groups of students will be assigned to read 2-3 related articles, summarize the content, and lead a class discussion highlighting their questions and critiques of methods used or conclusions drawn by the researchers. The goals of these activities are for students to A) be exposed to the basic methods of clinical research, B) understand how research evidence in clinical psychology differs from beliefs/opinions, and C) begin to critically evaluate the quality of research evidence.

The second activity, which takes place during the final third of the course, involves students working in groups answer the question of whether a specific method of treatment is effective in treating a specific psychological disorder. In the course of this inquiry, they will summarize the theoretical rationale for the treatment and review the evidence regarding its effectiveness. They will then present this information to their classmates. The specific goals of this activity are for students to A) implement an effective discovery process for scholarly inquiry, B) select and evaluate evidence regarding these treatments, and C) situate these results within a broader context by identifying limitations and gaps in current knowledge. The overall aim of the module is to enable students select a specific question they’re interested in, then actively apply scientific research to a pressing, applied problem.

WORK PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

* June-August 2016:
  + Instructor research into curricular design and inquiry-based projects
  + Consultation with faculty within the psychology department to facilitate smooth transition for students moving from Clinical Psychology to Capstone.
  + Assignment and rubric design/revision
  + Creation of databases including treatment manuals, key foundational articles, and videos showcasing implementation of different therapies
* January-May 2017:
  + Implementation and assessment of course module

FORM AND SCHEDULE FOR ASSESSMENT OF THE INNOVATION

* January-May 2017:
  + Gather student feedback throughout module
  + Student projects will be assessed according to rubric and necessary changes will be made prior to next iteration of course
  + Psychology faculty will be invited to sit in on course during activities to provide feedback and ideas for revision

PROPOSED BUDGET

Faculty stipend: $2000

Treatment manuals: $300

TOTAL: $2300