



Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum

Psychology A/T/M

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The *Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum: Psychology* will guide the writing of the BSSS *Psychology A/T/M* course.
- 1.2 This paper has been prepared following consultation with Professor Michael Platow, Australian National University, and the deliberations of the *Psychology* course writers.
- 1.3 The paper should be read in conjunction with *The Shape of the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum* located at:
http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/bsss_course_development_consultation

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The *Psychology A/T/M* Course will be the basis of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in ACT senior secondary schools.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies is reviewing the *Psychology A/T/M* course in the five -year course development cycle of improvement and renewal.
- 3.2 All courses under development are required to meet Board design specifications and to align with Board requirements for senior secondary curriculum. These specifications align with ACARA course design specifications and provide teachers with flexibility to plan, teach and assess according to the needs and interests of their students.
- 3.3 The BSSS *Psychology A/T/M* course will be redeveloped under the *Science Framework*, reflecting the nature of the discipline and the Board endorsed decision to consolidate Course Frameworks to enhance consistency of quality across Frameworks. There may be some arguments as to why the course could be developed under the *Humanities and Social Science Framework*, but based on the advice of experts and for the following reasons, the course has been placed in the *Science Framework*:
 - the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council requires that tertiary courses for psychologists be “science based” (APAC, 2019, p. 8)
 - Psychology is regarded by academics and researchers as predominantly a Science
 - most Psychology courses in Australia developed for senior secondary students have been written as Science courses
 - Psychology is scientific in its specific empirical approach to predicting, describing, explaining, and drawing conclusions about human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour
 - there are a range of experimental and non-experimental studies that can be undertaken by students that will enable them to develop skills and capacity in scientific inquiry, and an appreciation of multiple perspectives
 - students will use both quantitative and qualitative methods as appropriate to the study
 - students will examine and evaluate scientific academic research.

The *Science Framework* is located at:

http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/Frameworks/new_frameworks_in_2021

The rationale for this framework describes Science as:

The study of Science is the unveiling of the mysteries of the universe in order to make sense of nature in all its wonder and complexity. Through knowledge, observation, questioning, experimentation, discussion, critical analysis and creative thinking in a

scientific context, students develop their investigative, analytical and communication skills while cultivating an appreciation of the natural world.

Scientific processes test current understandings and are continually re-evaluated. Students are challenged to examine and reconsider their understanding of scientific concepts, inquiry methods and phenomena. Students apply their knowledge of science to solve problems, make evidence-based decisions and engage in public debate about contemporary issues from a scientific perspective. The study of science explores ways in which scientists work collaboratively and individually in a range of integrated fields to increase understanding of an ever-expanding body of scientific knowledge. They examine strategies proposed to address major scientific challenges now and in the future in local, national, and global contexts.

Studying senior secondary Science provides students with a suite of cognitive and social skills and understandings that are valuable to a wide range of further study pathways and careers. Studying Science will enable students to become citizens who are more knowledgeable about the world around them and who have the critical skills to evaluate issues and make informed decisions.

3.4 All courses based on this Framework should enable students to develop:

- sense of wonder and curiosity about nature and an appreciation of how scientific knowledge can be used to address contemporary issues
- understanding of the theories and models used to describe, explain, and make predictions about systems, structures, and properties to provide a reliable basis for action
- understanding that scientific knowledge is developing over time, is being used in a variety of contexts; and influences, and is continuing to be influenced by, historical, social, economic, cultural, and ethical considerations and new discoveries understanding that Science is experimental and has developed through independent and collaborative research, and has significant impacts on society and implications for decision making
- ability to design and conduct a variety of field and laboratory investigations involving collection and critical analysis of data, and interpretation of evidence
- ability to critically evaluate scientific concepts, interpretations and claims in order to solve problems and generate informed, considered, and ethical conclusions
- ability to communicate scientific understanding, findings, arguments, and conclusions using appropriate representations, modes, and genres.

3.5 Concepts from the *Science Framework* (page 6) build on ACARA's F-10 Science curriculum:

- Science inquiry skills
- Science as human endeavour
- Science understanding

All courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate should enable students to develop essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners. The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum. While developing all capabilities, the *Psychology* course will engage with the capabilities of Creative and Critical Thinking, Ethical understanding, and Numeracy.

The General Capability of Critical and Creative Thinking will be developed by *Psychology* through their critical examination of theories, inquiry methodologies, data, and arguments.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives, and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking involves students thinking broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours, and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination, and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/critical-and-creative-thinking/>

Students in *Psychology* will engage with the general capability of Personal and Social Capability in the study of human thoughts feelings and behaviours at the heart of Psychology. They will develop an understanding of the significance of relationships and empathy in a social context.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. Personal and social capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others, and understanding relationships, establishing, and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>

Students in *Psychology* will engage with the General Capability of Ethical Understanding by engaging with significant ethical questions that determine how scientific knowledge is produced and how such knowledge is applied to improve the well-being of people.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop ethical understanding as they identify and investigate the nature of ethical concepts, values, and character traits, and understand how reasoning can assist ethical judgement. Ethical understanding involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict, and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others ... As students engage with the elements of Ethical Understanding in an integrated way, they learn to recognise the complexity of many ethical issues. They develop a capacity to make reasoned ethical judgements through the investigation of a range of questions drawn from varied contexts in the curriculum.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/ethical-understanding/>

4. THE CONTEXT OF THE ACT

4.1 Courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate:

- provide a variety of pathways, to meet different learning needs and encourage students to complete their secondary education
- enable students to develop the essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners
- empower students as active participants in their own learning
- engage students in contemporary issues relevant to their lives
- foster students' intellectual, social, and ethical development
- nurture students' wellbeing, and physical and spiritual development
- enable effective and respectful participation in a diverse society.

4.2 Each course of study:

- comprises an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum
- is based on a model of learning that integrates intended student outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment
- outlines teaching strategies which are grounded in learning principles and encompass quality teaching
- promotes intellectual quality, establish a rich learning environment, and generates relevant connections between learning and life experiences
- provides formal assessment and certification of students' achievements.

4.3 In consideration of the ACT context, and in response to contemporary research and literature, a Psychology curriculum should include:

- a student-centred pedagogical approach
- a scientific method
- the educational needs of young people with respect to psychological questions and problems
- the *Science Framework* and Achievement Standards
- the needs of different schools and sectors (government and non-government)
- scope for studying a range of psychological perspectives and theories
- the contestability of and contingency of knowledge generated by psychological research.

5. AIMS OF THE PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM

By undertaking Psychology, students aim to inquire into how and “why we do the things we do.” (Burton, L. et al 2019, p. 5). They learn to engage meaningfully with different views, produce their own data and critiques, and justify their own conclusions in informed discussion. While philosophy and the humanities have set many of the questions that confront young people, “psychology as a science has provided new means for answering those long-asked questions.” (Burton, L. et al 2019, p. 10) Myers and De Wall similarly argues that “psychologists search for answers differently, by scientifically studying how we act, think, and feel. They do so with critical thinking and the scientific attitude.” (Myers, D.G and Dewall, C.N., 2020, p.1) They aim to become critical and scientific thinkers who engage with the larger questions of life.

Students become informed and critical scientific thinkers who consume writing on psychological well-being and phenomena critically. The Australian Psychological Society defines Psychology as a science that is “In essence, psychology studies individuals and groups to better understand how people, communities, and societies’ function and... thrive.” (APS, 2020) This is challenging task which Burton reminds us requires Erikson’s notion of “triple book keeping” in analysing processes and behaviour by “simultaneously tracking biological events, psychological experiences and cultural and historical contexts.”(Burton, L. et al 2019, p. 5) Further, the attention paid to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander perspective on Psychology will create understanding of Indigenous paradigms, norms and psychological practice and “the opportunity for non-Indigenous students to understand the shared history and contemporary effects of colonisation on all Australians, and to benefit from Indigenous knowledges.”(AIPEP, 2016, p. 13 and 15)

Psychology is both a discipline and a profession. Students in secondary school focus entirely on the discipline, as it would be dangerous to encourage students to consider themselves as possessing therapeutic skills beyond a critical self-awareness.

The *Psychology* course aims to provide students opportunities to:

- critically analyse psychological concepts, processes, theories, models, and the approaches that produce them
- analyse the human behaviour and the impact of factors that influence how humans feel, think and act at an individual, group and societal level
- evaluate psychological approaches to answering significant questions about the nature of humanity, such as nature-nature, body-mind, consciousness
- seek out meaningful interdisciplinary connections to other disciplines and real-world contexts
- understand the impact of changing contexts on the production, representation and reception of psychological knowledge and practices
- develop cultural responsiveness and cultural awareness in addressing problems in psychology, including of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- develop ethical science inquiry skills
- evaluate qualitative and quantitative data and the methodologies that produce and represent data
- communicate in a range of modes and mediums for specific purposes and audiences, including standard APA research reports
- develop study and work skills in individual and group contexts
- reflect on their own learning, ethical practices, and well-being.

6. STRUCTURE OF THE PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM

The units are structured around the major areas of research and inquiry in psychology. These units allow the exploration of significant questions about the nature and causation of behaviour and mental processes using different approaches in psychology and allows a focus on contemporary research and understanding. It also allows Programs of Learning to explore a range of contexts in which Psychological concepts are applied.

The elective topics in the unit will be removed from the course document. However, teachers and schools will be free to develop Programs of Learning that reflect those electives should they choose to do so. Programs of Learning allow teachers and schools the flexibility to pursue current developments, students interests and contextual imperatives, while the content descriptions and Achievement Standards set a consistent standard. This combination provides opportunities for classwork to remain current and responsive. The Independent Study unit will allow students with interest in an area to pursue a deep investigation in that topic. This provides further flexibility to engage and extend students in their final semester of study.

RATIONALE

Psychology is the study of the human mind and behaviour. Students develop an understanding of themselves and others by exploring the interactions of biological, social, and psychological factors in individuals and groups.

Students develop scientific inquiry skills. As a science, the subject matter of this course is founded on knowledge and understanding that has been gained through systematic inquiry and scientific research. Scientific literacy is treated as a core underlying principle to the development of deep understanding in the subject. Students are introduced to new discoveries and advances, as well as considering the ethical issues relating to treatment and research. As a result, students learn to think critically, to evaluate evidence, to solve problems and to communicate understanding of human behaviour, thoughts, and feelings scientifically. Students apply evidence-based research to understanding and interpreting data. They develop analytical and critical thinking skills and learn to question and challenge assumptions about human feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. Students develop skills to communicate effectively, and present logical and coherent arguments.

The study of Psychology enables learners to understand how individuals think, feel and act within different contexts. Such knowledge has the potential to empower and enhance individual abilities and facilitate awareness of the human condition, along with tolerance and respect for others. Students develop their knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts, and perspectives to explain cognition, feelings, and behaviour. They analyse the nature and purpose of psychology and develop insights into types of feelings, thoughts, and behaviour across a range of contexts.

The study of Psychology develops the capacity and capability to transition to tertiary and industry courses, as well as different pathways. The course will provide critical thinking and communication skills valuable for a wide a range of life and work settings. Their understanding of people and multiple perspectives will enable and enrich their interactions with people and groups.

UNITS

The units have been drafted for discussion as follows:

Self and Identity

Students examine traditional and contemporary understandings of how people develop both unique and shared identities with others, using a range of approaches, including the nature-nurture debate. In examining differences, they will focus on individual difference in thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Students develop skills in ethically and scientifically generating, evaluating, and communicating valid qualitative and quantitative data and conclusions. They develop personal, social, and intercultural capability by engaging in the study of the nature of people and the world around them.

This unit provides opportunities for teachers to develop programs of learning that reflect student interest and teacher expertise, such as, personality, intelligence, human development, and social influence.

Cognition and Emotion

This unit examines traditional and contemporary understandings of the basis of human cognition and emotion. Students explore how our perception of, and feelings about, the world shapes our interaction with it. They develop skills in ethically and scientifically generating, evaluating, and communicating valid qualitative and quantitative data and conclusions. Students develop personal, social, and intercultural capability by engaging in the study of the nature of people and the world around them.

This unit provides opportunities for teachers to develop programs of learning that reflect student interest and teacher expertise, such as consciousness, perception, neuroscience, memory and forgetting, learning, and intelligence.

Normality and Abnormality

This unit examines traditional and contemporary understandings of the continuum of normality and abnormality, and the social construction of healthy and unhealthy thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Students explore biological, psychological, and social, and contextual aspects of normality and abnormality, how they are determined, and how that has changed over time. They develop skills in ethically and scientifically generating, evaluating, and communicating valid qualitative and quantitative data and conclusions. Students develop personal, social, and intercultural capability by engaging in the study of the nature of people and the world around them.

This unit provides opportunities for teachers to develop programs of learning that reflect student interest and teacher expertise, such as mental health, stress resilience and coping, forensic, and criminal.

Groups and Society

This unit examines traditional and contemporary understandings of the implications of identity and membership within groups and society for thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. They explore how and why humans think, feel and act in group and social settings using a range of approaches. They develop skills in ethically and scientifically generating, evaluating, and communicating valid qualitative and quantitative data and conclusions. Students develop personal, social, and intercultural capability by engaging in the study of the nature of people and the world around them.

This unit provides opportunities for teachers to develop programs of learning that reflect student interest and teacher expertise, such as attitudes, stereotypes, social influence, prejudice, organizational, and human relationships

Independent Study

An Independent study unit has an important place in senior secondary courses. It is a valuable pedagogical approach that empowers students to make decisions about their own learning. An Independent study unit must be proposed by an individual student for their own study and negotiated with their teacher. An Independent study unit requires the principal's written approval. The program of learning for an Independent study unit must meet all the content descriptions as appears in the course. Independent study units are only available to individual students in Year 12. Pre-requisites for an Independent study unit are that students have completed at least **THREE** standard 1.0 units from a course.

7. CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Incorporating a futures orientation

The new course design specifications free teachers to redevelop programs of learning that engage with new discoveries and research in their discipline. Further, the emphasis on scientific literacy, understanding the scientific method and interrogating public representations of science will empower students as lifelong learners to engage critically with new information and new writing in Psychology. In understanding the nature of people and their society, they are equipped to grow and function in society.

The *ACT Future of Education Strategy* aim to allows students agency in being “active participants in their learning” by developing students “interests, knowledge and skills”. Psychology provides opportunities for teachers and students to develop their interests in this area and through programs of learning and independent studies components develop courses particular to contexts and interests. Further, students will develop inquiries into areas of particular interest and develop a “high standard of literacy and numeracy” in critically analysing, representing, and communicating their findings. (ACT Government, Future of Education Strategy Website, 2018) Further, Psychology as a body of knowledge contributes to students developing a better understanding of themselves and others and growing to be “mature and resilient adults” (Berry, Y, 2018)

Similarly, the *Alice Springs Mparntwe Declaration* has as a goal “All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.” (2019, p. 5) With a critical and scientific understanding of people and human behaviour, students of Psychology will be well-equipped “for their potential life roles as friends, family, community and workforce members” and able to “embrace opportunities, make informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions.” (p. 5) Further, as life-long learners equipped with a scientific education, they will be well able to meet Mparntwe’s goals that students be “inquisitive and experimental and have the ability to test different sources and types of knowledge” (p. 5) By inquiring into Psychology’s methods and observing and understanding others, they will have experience in acting with “moral and ethical integrity” and “have empathy for circumstances of others”. (p. 5)

The Psychology course offers opportunities for students to understand themselves and others while developing scientific, ethical, personal, and social capability, numeracy and literacy skills that will be invaluable to life and further education. This will empower students to be active participants in their communities and society.

7.2 Psychology curriculum

The *Psychology* curriculum retains an important place in ACT senior secondary curriculum. The curriculum fosters higher order thinking, scientific inquiry, and communication skills. They will become more critical and literate consumers of psychological information in the general media and creators of their own well-informed content. They will better understand the nature of people and society and themselves.

7.3 Equity and opportunity

The *Psychology* course provides flexibility and choice for teachers and students. The factors that influence this choice include school and community contexts, local community learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues, and available learning resources.

The *Psychology* course provides opportunities for students to develop an understanding of aspects of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They offer the opportunity to view the individual and society from a range of perspectives, including indigenous, gender, and neurodiverse.

7.4 Connections to other learning areas

Psychology is a Science course with interdisciplinary connections to other Sciences and the Social Sciences. The learning acquired by students in *Psychology* contributes to learning in other areas such as *Biology, Chemistry, Philosophy, Sociology, Commerce, History, Literature, and the Arts*. The course will identify where there are links or opportunities to build cross curriculum learning. The connections are implicit to the Psychology curriculum.

7.5 Role of digital technologies

Students and teachers integrate a growing range of online information, tools and applications of diverse origins and perspectives. These include digitised online materials such as research papers, data sets, case studies and popular psychology media, as well as other online resources including databases, reference works and indexes to library holdings.

Further, digital platforms, such as social media, are also a factor influencing people and behaviour and a rich area of study in of itself.

7.6 Clarity of curriculum

The curriculum is substantial and flexible. It is sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience but avoid excessive prescription that would hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills. The curriculum document is expressed clearly in terms that are accessible to a new teacher, who is well-educated in their discipline and in pedagogy, while allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.

7.7 Breadth and depth of study

Content descriptions specify the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to learn and that teachers are expected to teach. Teachers are required to develop a program of learning that allows students to demonstrate all the content descriptions.

A program of learning is what a college provides to implement the course for a subject meeting students' needs and interests. It is at the discretion of the teacher to emphasis some content descriptions over others. The teacher may teach additional (not listed) content if it meets the specific unit goals providing that it does not duplicate content in other units.

7.8 The nature of the learner

The courses address the needs of diverse learners and cater for Tertiary (T), Accredited (A) and Modified (M) levels of study.

7.9 General capabilities

Skills and understanding related all ACARA General Capabilities are developed and used in *Psychology*. These will be expressed through the content descriptions, achievement standards and programs of learning.

7.10 Cross curriculum perspectives

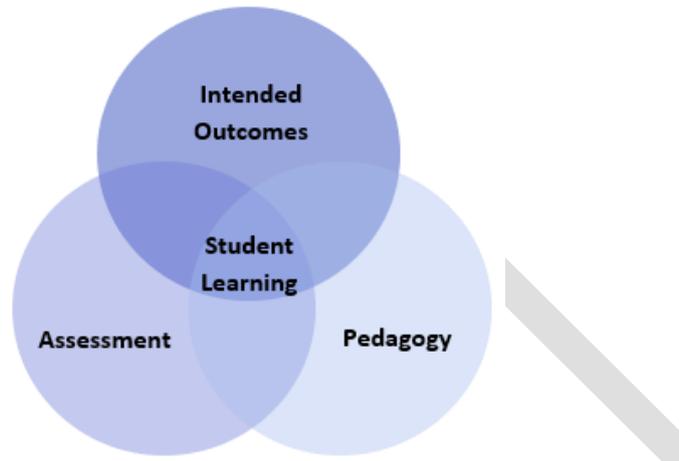
Each of these perspectives, Indigenous education, sustainability, and Australia's links with Asia, are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area. Curriculum documents are explicit as to how the perspectives are dealt with in each course and how links can be made between learning areas. Indeed, as Dudgeon argues, "Clearly the oldest living cultures in the world have something to share with non-Indigenous societies about survival, sustainability, wellness and health. It is imperative that psychology students are given opportunities to engage with these knowledges and values." There are rich opportunities to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the *Psychology* course. Students will consider the psychological aspects of sustainability, such as the impact of environmental degradation and disaster on psychological well-being. Further, in considering context of psychological development, social habits, judgements and norms, students will consider cultural variations in psychological issues such as those found in Asia and Australia.

8. PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The underpinning beliefs and learning principles for the development of ACT Board of Senior Secondary School curriculum as are follows:

8.1 Underpinning beliefs

- All students are able to learn
- Learning is a partnership between students and teachers
- Teachers are responsible for advancing student learning.



8.2 Learning Principles

1. Learning builds on existing knowledge, understandings, and skills.
(*Prior knowledge*)
2. When learning is organised around major concepts, principles, and significant real-world issues, within and across disciplines, it helps students make connections and build knowledge structures.
(*Deep knowledge and connectedness*)
3. Learning is facilitated when students actively monitor their own learning and consciously develop ways of organising and applying knowledge within and across contexts.
(*Metacognition*)
4. Learners' sense of self and motivation to learn affects learning.
(*Self-concept*)
5. Learning needs to take place in a context of high expectations.
(*High expectations*)
6. Learners learn in different ways and at different rates.
(*Individual differences*)
7. Different cultural environments, including the use of language, shape learners' understandings and the way they learn.
(*Socio-cultural effects*)
8. Learning is a social and collaborative function as well as an individual one.
(*Collaborative learning*)
9. Learning is strengthened when learning outcomes and criteria for judging learning are made explicit and when students receive frequent feedback on their progress.
(*Explicit expectations and feedback*).

9. CONCLUSION

The *Psychology A/T/M* course is to be developed under the *Science Framework*. The study of the Sciences promotes critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, and personal and social capability equipping young citizens for the demands and challenges of a rapidly changing world in which scientific claims are used to justify significant national and international decisions. The Psychology course equips students to analyse the self, others, society, and the ties that connect them to the challenges and opportunities that they face in the contemporary world.

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