Executive Committee  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
240 Schaffer Hall  

Dear Colleagues,

The faculty of the Department of Psychology have voted by overwhelming majority to change the name of the department to the “Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences.” We are excited about the possibility of changing our name, and hope that you will endorse this name change.

Established in 1887, the Department of Psychology at Iowa has a long and venerable history. It is the sixth oldest psychology department in the U.S., and many luminaries in the field received their degree from Iowa. Under the leadership of Kenneth Spence in the 1950s, the department left its stamp on the entire field of psychology by advocating the “experimental psychology” approach to the study of behavior. This approach applied the scientific method to the study of behavior, with the aim of discovering the laws of behavior through rigorous scientific theory building and testing.

There are two primary reasons for the proposed name change. First, the field of psychology has undergone massive change over the last 30 years with the advent of noninvasive technology to measure human brain functioning (e.g., scalp-recorded EEG, functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy). These techniques (in combination with more invasive animal neurophysiological techniques) have opened up new doors for understanding how normal and disordered behavior is related to brain functioning. The Department of Psychology has kept abreast of these changes in the field in both our teaching and research. For example, we now require all Psychology majors to take Biological Psychology (31:002) as part of our introductory sequence. In addition, many of our faculty and students are engaged in either human or animal neuroscience research. As a result, we are finding that “Psychology” does not accurately represent either the current state or future direction of the department. By adding “Brain Sciences” to our name, we provide a more accurate umbrella to describe the teaching and research activities of the department, and we communicate our commitment to unlocking the links between brain and behavior to constituents both inside and outside of the university.

Second, although the field of psychology is a science, the dominant perception from the outside is that psychology is about clinical analysis and therapy. In reality, our department spans research and teaching from mapping neural circuits involved in learning and memory to understanding how social support impacts ovarian cancer progression. We also use a wide variety of techniques, including single cell recording, behavioral neuroimaging, virtual environment technology, eye tracking, behavioral observation, gene sequencing, neuropsychological testing, and immunological assays. Ironically, although our department played a strong historical role in shaping the field of psychology as a science, even colleagues in other areas of the University most closely associate Psychology with clinical analysis and
therapy. This has been an impediment to communicating the breadth of what we do to the rest of the University and the public at large. By changing “Psychology” to “Psychological Sciences” in our name, we provide a more accurate representation of who we are and what we do to the outside world.

This name change is also consistent with many of our peer departments. For example, the following psychology departments have all changed their name to Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences: Indiana University, Johns Hopkins University, Dartmouth University, University of California, Santa Barbara, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the University of Delaware. We have also received letters of support for our name change from the Psychology departments at Iowa State University and University of Northern Iowa.

In closing, we believe that the change to the “Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences” is long overdue and will have a positive impact on how we communicate our teaching and research missions to the public at large and to the academic community.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Jodie M. Plumert, PhD
Professor and Chair
Collegiate Fellow, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
1. Provide a brief description of the department/program.

The Department of Psychology has two intertwined missions: 1) providing outstanding learning opportunities for our students in the classroom and the lab, and 2) producing leading-edge research that enhances our understanding of both normal and disordered behavioral and brain functioning. We offer both a B.S. and a B.A. degree in Psychology at the undergraduate level, and a Ph.D. at the graduate level. We are the largest undergraduate major at the UI (1,300 majors) and teach 23,000 student credit hours per year. We have approximately 75 Ph.D. students and six graduate training areas: Behavioral & Cognitive Neuroscience, Clinical Psychology, Cognition & Perception, Developmental Science, Health Psychology, and Social Psychology. The Psychology faculty have an outstanding record of research activity that contributes to the CLAS and UI goals of enhancing leading-edge research and scholarship. In the most recent National Research Council (NRC) review of graduate programs, our department was ranked 6th among all public institutions in Research Activity (the core measure of research productivity), and 20th among all institutions.

2. Describe reasons (justification) for the proposed name change. Include information about the value of the name change to the department, program, the discipline, college, and/or the university.

There are two primary reasons for the proposed name change. First, the field of psychology has undergone massive change over the last 30 years with the advent of noninvasive technology to measure human brain functioning (e.g., scalp-recorded EEG, functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy). These new techniques (in combination with more invasive animal neurophysiological techniques) have opened up new doors for understanding how normal and disordered behavior is related to brain functioning. The
Department of Psychology has kept abreast of these changes in the field in both our teaching and research. For example, we now require all Psychology majors to take Biological Psychology (31:002) as part of our introductory sequence. In addition, many of our faculty and students are engaged in either human or animal neuroscience research. As a result, we are finding that “Psychology” does not accurately represent either the current state or future direction of the department. By adding “Brain Sciences” to our name, we provide a more accurate umbrella to describe the teaching and research activities of the department, and we communicate our commitment to unlocking the links between brain and behavior to constituents both inside and outside of the university.

Second, although the field of psychology is a science, the dominant perception from the outside is that psychology is exclusively about clinical analysis and therapy. In reality, our department spans research and teaching from mapping neural circuits involved in learning and memory to understanding how social support impacts ovarian cancer progression to identifying risk factors for unintentional childhood injuries. We use a wide variety of techniques, including single cell recording, behavioral neuroimaging, virtual environment technology, eye tracking, behavioral observation, gene sequencing, neuropsychological testing, and immunological assays. By changing “Psychology” to “Psychological Sciences” in our name, we provide a more accurate representation of who we are and what we do to the outside world.

For both of these reasons, we believe that the change to the “Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences” is long overdue and will have a positive impact on how we communicate our teaching and research missions to the public at large and to the academic community.

3. If this is a department name change, describe how the proposed name is consistent with the mission of the college.

The Department of Psychology has long been a part of the natural sciences within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). Adding “Sciences” to our name clarifies our place within the natural sciences. The addition of “Brain” to our name also underscores our involvement in the neurosciences, a major focus of interdisciplinary teaching and research within both CLAS and the larger University. For example, Psychology faculty have long been part of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience, a T32 training grant funded by NIH and administered by the Graduate College. Many PhD students in the program are supervised (and financially supported) by our faculty, and our faculty sit on many of the committees in the program. The Department of Psychology is also engaged in strengthening the connections between CLAS and the Carver College of Medicine (CCOM) through joint faculty positions in Psychology (CLAS) and Neurology (CCOM). These positions are designed to leverage unique strengths and resources across CLAS and CCOM.

4. Will the proposed name change be consistent with other institutions? Identify other institutions that have the same or similar name to the proposed name.

Many other psychology departments have changed their name to “Psychological and Brain Sciences” in recent years (or some variant thereof). A sampling of these institutions include:

Indiana University
Johns Hopkins University
Dartmouth University
University of California, Santa Barbara
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
University of Delaware
MIT (“Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences”)
5. Is the proposed name consistent with association/accreditation designations?

   Yes.

6. Describe program configuration changes that will result from the proposed name change, e.g., change in number of credit hours required, etc.

   There will be no changes in either the undergraduate or graduate program.

7. Describe how current students will be affected by the proposed department/program name change.

   Our current undergraduate and graduate students will not be adversely affected by the proposed departmental name change. The degree name for both undergraduate and graduate students will remain “Psychology.”

8. What costs will be incurred by the proposed name change? Identify new resources that will be needed in connection with the proposed name change, e.g., facilities, faculty, funds, etc.

   No new costs will incurred by the proposed name change.
Dear Dr. Plumert:

Thank you for your letter requesting our endorsement of your departmental name change. I understand that the change to “Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences” reflects both the strengths of your faculty and national trends in the names of departments with programs like yours.

I am happy to support your request for this name change as it moves forward to the Regents.

I have been in contact with the Dean of Iowa State University’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and she fully supports your name change as well.

Sincerely yours,

Carolyn E. Cutrona, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Psychology
Iowa State University
515-294-0282
cutrona@iastate.edu

cc: Beate Schmittmann, Dean
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Iowa State University
September 18, 2014

Dr. Jodie Plumert  
Chair  
Department of Psychology  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, IA 52245

Dear Dr. Plumert:

Thank you for contacting the Department of Psychology at University of Northern Iowa regarding the proposed name change of the Department of Psychology at the University of Iowa to the “Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences.” This proposed name changes reflects national trends in naming departments focused on the science of psychology such as the program at the University of Iowa.

I support your proposed name change for the Department of Psychology to the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences.

I have been in contact with Brenda Bass, the Dean of the University of Northern Iowa’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and she supports the proposed name change as well.

Eric J. Hiris, Ph.D.  
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cc:  
Brenda Bass, Dean  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of Northern Iowa

April Chatham-Carpenter, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean, Graduate College  
Interim Associate Provost for Academic Affairs  
University of Northern Iowa

Michael Licari  
Interim Executive Vice President and Provost  
University of Northern Iowa