links between psychology and public policy (Campbell, 1996) and creating an overview of psychology through great books (Huff, 2001). Any of these issues-based approaches to a capstone course will encourage students to integrate ideas they have encountered throughout their major and help them to appreciate the complexity of psychology.

In our department, the issues-based seminar is one of three capstone options, the others being a history and systems seminar and a thesis (some students take two options). These options allow students to select an experience that best fits their own postgraduate goals and, we believe, increases the interest of students selecting a particular capstone option. We encourage other departments to consider an issues-based capstone course as an alternative or supplement to capstones they currently offer.

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Notes

1. Details regarding the course structure, readings, and discussion questions can be obtained from either author and at http://www.lemoyne.edu/OTRP/projectsyllabus.html#capstone.
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Important Topics in an Introduction to the Psychology Major Course

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We surveyed psychology departments nationwide to determine the most important issues in undergraduate psychology education via an Introduction to the Psychology Major course. This type of course is becoming popular, with 34.2% of reporting departments offering such a course. Respondents rated 33 undergraduate education issues with respect to importance. We discuss these results in the context of increasing popularity of the psychology major and the course-based method of communicating academic and career advising information to students.

The popularity of the psychology major continues to grow. For the 1997 to 1998 year, 73,972 students earned their bachelor's degree in psychology in the United States. Just 20 years ago, 44,879 students earned a bachelor's degree in psychology (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). This accelerated growth rate places new demands on psychology departments to provide academic and career advising services to students. There are many ways to communicate this type of information to students (Ware, 1981), such as informal seminars (Lammers, 2001; Oles & Cooper, 1988) or through psychology clubs (Satterfield & Abramson, 1998). Many departments, however, opt to communicate academic and career advising information through coursework.

In examining the literature, we found that most career-related courses are for upper level undergraduate students (Davis, 1988; Dodson, Chastain, & Landrum, 1996; Ware, 1981, 1985; Ware & Beischel, 1979) or for those aiming for graduate school (Buskist, 1999). There are few such courses for lower level students.

Murray (1999) reported that the earlier psychology students are prepared, the more successful and less anxious they will be. Being exposed to the necessary requirements for graduate school, job options, résumé writing, and the interview process may reduce senior panic. Looney, Thomas, and McDaniel (2000) reported that a required one-credit career planning course increased students' knowledge about career possibilities and increased confidence in making career decisions.

Knowing when to offer career-related courses is an important issue. When students select a major can influence what they need to know. What are the most important topics to be covered for all undergraduate psychology majors? Do psychologists agree on such a core of topics? To answer these questions, we conducted a national survey of psychology departments. In addition, we asked departments if they had a course similar to Introduction to the Psychology Major (IPM) course, and if so, we asked about the details of the course.

Method

Participants

We surveyed all undergraduate psychology departments in the United States. We sent letters to department chairs, and if the chair did not have the time to complete the survey, we asked him or her to forward the survey to a knowledgeable member of the faculty. From a pool of 1,610 psychology departments, 357 responded (22.2%). Note that the following results reflect only the respondents to this survey.

Materials and Procedure

From a literature review and in consultation with content experts, we developed a 33-item survey about issues related to majoring in psychology (see Table 1). A cover letter addressed to the department chair accompanied the survey, along with a self-addressed business reply envelope. Letters were sent via first-class mail in April 1999.

Results

Descriptive Outcomes

Respondents rated the 33 issues for psychology undergraduate students on a scale ranging from 0 to 3 (0 = *not at all important*, 1 = *slightly important*, 2 = *moderately important*, 3 = *extremely important*). Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of faculty ratings in descending order. An IPM course was reported by 122 of 357 respondents (34.2%). Of those, 80.8% offered the class for a grade (19.2% offered it pass–fail), and 77.9% of departments required the course.

Course Availability Differences

We used an independent means t test to detect differences between schools with and without an IPM course (see Table 2).

Significant differences emerged for 17 of the 33 items. A word of caution is warranted concerning Type I errors.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations in Descending Order of Importance for Undergraduates Enrolled in an Introduction to the Psychology Major Course

Issue	*M*	*SD*
Understand the course requirements for the undergraduate major.	2.78	.49
Understand the ethical considerations of conducting research.	2.62	.63
Understand the ethical implications of studying psychology.	2.57	.66
Have a good understanding of the study skills needed for success.	2.56	.62
Know the information needed to apply to graduate programs.	2.50	.61
Can write in APA format.	2.48	.72
Know how to find information using PsycLIT or PsycINFO database.	2.47	.65
Have the skills and abilities to work in a psychology-related job.	2.45	.68
Know about the opportunities in psychology outside the classroom.	2.41	.64
Understand the importance of math and science in psychology.	2.40	.66
Are prepared for any type of post-BA/BS degree career.	2.38	.66
Know how to apply to graduate school.	2.30	.69
Are familiar with the jobs available with a BA/BS degree in psychology.	2.27	.70
Know about bachelor's level career options in psychology.	2.16	.75
Understand how to find information on the Internet/Web.	2.15	.76
Know the value of letters of recommendation.	2.11	.75
Know about the career services available on campus.	2.06	.81
Know about master's level career options in psychology.	2.06	.76
Know how to write a résumé.	2.05	.80
Understand the value of completing an internship.	2.04	.79
Have information on doctoral-level career options in psychology.	2.02	.74
Understand other disciplines related to psychology.	1.97	.72
Know whether they want to go to graduate school.	1.95	.80
Have the ability to overcome math anxiety.	1.90	.81
Know how to find career/graduate school resources on the Web.	1.85	.76
Are committed to the discipline of psychology.	1.82	.77
Know how to write a curriculum vita.	1.82	.88
Are familiar with the careers that our graduates have attained.	1.75	.75
Understand the role of the interview in career seeking.	1.74	.85
Understand the value of serving as a research assistant.	1.73	.80
Know that psychology is the best major to meet their goals.	1.69	.93
Understand the value of serving as a teaching assistant.	1.31	.83
Have a career goal that is psychology related.	1.16	.90

Note. Each statement began with "Our students ... ." Respondents used the scale in which 0 = *not at all important*, 1 = *slightly important*, 2 = *moderately important*, 3 = *extremely important*. APA = American Psychological Association.

Table 2. Mean Differences Between Schools That Do and Do Not Offer an Introduction to the Psychology Major Course

Statements	Universities That Offer the Course (*M*)	Universities That Do Not Offer the Course (*M*)	*t*
Understand the course requirements for the undergraduate major.	2.80	2.77	0.51
Understand the ethical considerations of conducting research.	2.66	2.59	1.05
Understand the ethical implications of studying psychology.	2.63	2.54	1.19
Have a good understanding of the study skills needed for success.	2.57	2.54	0.41
Know the information needed to apply to graduate programs.	2.61	2.43	2.50*
Can write in APA format.	2.42	2.51	−1.10
Know how to find information using PsycLIT or PsycINFO database.	2.51	2.45	0.81
Have the skills and abilities to work in a psychology-related job.	2.52	2.41	1.31
Know about the opportunities in psychology outside the classroom.	2.54	2.33	2.90*
Understand the importance of math and science in psychology.	2.40	2.40	0.01
Are prepared for any type of post-BA/BS degree career.	2.53	2.29	3.19**
Know how to apply to graduate school.	2.43	2.22	2.64**
Are familiar with the jobs available with a BA/BS degree in psychology.	2.51	2.14	4.80**
Know about bachelor's level career options in psychology.	2.37	2.05	3.84**
Understand how to find information on the Internet/Web.	2.27	2.07	2.28*
Know the value of letters of recommendation.	2.30	2.01	3.47**
Know about the career services available on campus.	2.22	1.97	2.74**
Know about master's level career options in psychology.	2.19	1.98	2.38*
Know how to write a résumé.	2.19	1.96	2.48*
Understand the value of completing an internship.	2.15	1.96	2.50*
Have information on doctoral level career options in psychology.	2.14	1.95	2.21*
Understand other disciplines related to psychology.	2.01	1.94	0.89
Know whether they want to go to graduate school.	2.01	1.90	1.24
Have the ability to overcome math anxiety.	1.89	1.89	0.08
Know how to find career/graduate school resources on the Web.	1.97	1.77	2.27*
Are committed to the discipline of psychology.	1.96	1.74	2.53*
Know how to write a curriculum vita.	1.94	1.74	1.95
Are familiar with the careers that our graduates have attained.	1.94	1.64	3.62**
Understand the role of the interview in career seeking.	1.92	1.63	3.10**
Understand the value of serving as a research assistant.	1.76	1.70	0.64
Know that psychology is the best major to meet their goals.	1.78	1.64	1.38
Understand the value of serving as a teaching assistant.	1.37	1.26	1.12
Have a career goal that is psychology related.	1.29	1.08	2.14

Notes. The statements were preceded by the phrase "Our students . . . ." Respondents used the scale in which 0 = *not at all important*, 1 = *slightly important*, 2 = *moderately important*, 3 = *extremely important*. APA = American Psychological Association.
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

With 33 *t* tests, by chance alone 2 analyses (33/.05) would be expected to be significant. Table 2 presents 17 significant outcomes, thus it is reasonable to assume that 2 of these 17 outcomes are significant by chance alone (of course, those 2 are unknown). This leaves 15 outcomes still statistically significant. The point here is that there are many differences between schools that have and do not have the course; the only uncertainty is how many (15 or 17?).

In almost every case, faculty at universities having the course reported higher importance ratings than faculty at universities not having the course. For instance, faculty at schools with an IPM course believed it more important that their students (a) are familiar with the jobs available with a bachelor's degree in psychology, (b) know about bachelor's level career options in psychology, (c) are familiar with the careers of prior graduates, and (d) know the value of letters of recommendation. We do not know to what extent these differences were influenced by selection factors associated with returning the survey.

Discussion

The availability of the IPM course is not insignificant, with a third of respondents indicating such a course at their institution. Among issues faculty rated as most important were understanding course requirements, ethics, good study skills (including math and science), knowledge about graduate school and job opportunities, writing in American Psychological Association format and ability to find information using the PsycINFO database, and an understanding of the opportunities in psychology outside the classroom. Departments considering adding this course may want to review the data presented in Table 1. Instructors may gain insight in course planning from this information, for example, to see a complete range of topics and to see how colleagues rated the relative importance of topics. Additionally, departments currently offering the course may want to compare their topics with those reported in Table 1. Such a comparison can stimulate thinking about what topics to include or exclude. These topics should be evaluated

periodically to monitor changes in the discipline as well as to detect shifts in undergraduate education trends.

Why do only some departments offer such a course? By examining the significant differences on the items (see Table 2), we found that departments that offered IPM courses placed more importance on career preparation. Departments without the course may be more graduate school oriented and less bachelor's level career oriented. Although psychology educators prepare students for future endeavors (such as bachelor's degree careers or graduate school), they must also attend to the basic skills and abilities that students need to become good citizens and critical thinkers. Providing and completing an academic checklist is not sufficient; students need a variety of transferable skills to be successful lifelong learners.

Providing an IPM course may help to better inform students about career options beyond college, whether that is immediate employment or postgraduate education. This course delivers information about academic and career advice as well as information pertinent to undergraduate success in psychology. Examination and monitoring of these types of courses ensures that faculty provide students with information they need in a timely and efficient manner. How students use this information remains their responsibility.

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Notes

1. We acknowledge the assistance of faculty members nationwide for completing this survey, and we appreciate the helpful comments of the reviewers and the editor in the completion of this article.

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A Peer Advising Course for Undergraduate Psychology Majors

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This article focuses on a peer advising course I developed as part of the advising system in a large psychology department in a large urban university with a heterogeneous student body. The course provides undergraduates with information about graduate school and careers in psychology, fieldwork to explore and validate their career choices in a supervised setting, opportunities to develop both computer and informational literacy, practice in writing, and close interaction with a faculty member. Peer advisors provide other undergraduate majors with greater access to advising information. Ratings show the course benefits both peer advisors and their advisees.

Undergraduate academic advising has the potential to enhance both short- and long-term outcomes, including academic achievement, learning, retention, satisfaction with college, sense of competence, overall sense of identity, and, ultimately, the achievement of vocational and personal goals (e.g., Polson & Jurich, 1979; Titley & Titley, 1982; Ware, 1992). In many cases, the major advisor is the deciding factor in students finishing college (Rabinowitz & Seegmiller, 1989; Seegmiller & Rabinowitz, 1989).

Although peers can effectively transmit information to majors (Gentry, 1974), most descriptions of peer advising programs have provided little information about training or responsibilities (e.g., Halgin & Halgin, 1984; Lunneborg, 1988; McGovern & Hawks, 1984; Polson & Jurich, 1979; Titley & Titley, 1982). An exception is Heiney's (1977) description in which senior peer advisors (PAs) advised freshman psychology majors during 1 hr of their weekly senior seminar and for an additional hour each week; both PAs and their advisees reported profiting from PA advising.

Peer Advising Seminar

In an effort to provide better advising for our majors, I initiated a new course, Seminar in Peer Advising, in 1997. In this article I describe this seminar.

Course Objectives

This three-credit seminar integrated learning about both educational and career opportunities in psychology and re-