Appendix D
Super-department in Psychology
Subcommittee Report
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Prepared by a joint Human Development-Psychology Committee

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Charge
The charge from the President and Provost to the Social Sciences Implementation Committee (announced April 16, 2019):

Super-departments Objective
Our second objective is to answer the following set of questions, keeping in mind that the goal of any disciplinary structure is for Cornell to become truly-world class in the social science disciplines in the next 10-15 years, meaning we need to anticipate changes in these disciplines over time, as well as noting strategic investments our peers have made in the last 10-15 years.

- For the major social sciences disciplines of economics, psychology, and sociology, what are the specific advantages that could accrue from the creation, or expansion, of super-departments, and under what conditions (e.g., balancing across relevant areas within disciplines, as well as potentially having some shared foci across disciplines) would entering into super-departments make sense?

- What are the disadvantages, and how could they be mitigated? What strategic investments should be made to advance these efforts?

Introduction
The subcommittee approached this task thinking about the opportunities and benefits that will be brought about by creating a brand-new department in the psychology space that would welcome all faculty from the Department of Human Development (hereafter “HD”) in the College of Human Ecology (hereafter “CHE”) and the Psychology Department (hereafter “PSYCH”) in College of Arts and Sciences (hereafter “CAS”). This would mean that the HD and Psychology departments both would be disbanded and a new Super-department in the discipline of psychological science would be created with participation from faculty of both units – including psychologists and non-psychologists in both departments. In line with the charge from the President and Provost, this new Super-department should have the goal of
strengthening the discipline of psychological science at Cornell over the next 10-15 years and beyond. However, given that this new Super-department would contain faculty from both HD and Psychology, its scholarship and mission would have to be broad and inclusive of the interests of faculty across both units. To this end, there was considerable discussion about the name and structure of such a department, which is summarized in detail below.

We grouped our discussion into the three categories: Mission (what and how scholarship would be represented by this new unit?), Governance (how would decision-making happen in this new unit?), and Undergraduate/Graduate teaching and training (what would curricula and degrees and training look like?).

In this brief report, we want to emphasize that we see our objective as flagging important issues to be decided on by the full faculty in HD and Psychology. We do not attempt to solve any issues or challenges here, but instead try to identify them and, in some cases, sketch possible ways forward. We expect that if a new Super-department is created there will be collective decision-making by faculty on all these issues, and that there will be appropriate time for the required decision-making (i.e., it will take some time to build a new Super-department of this size and nature).

After describing the content of the categories of Mission, Governance, and Teaching/Training, we note the resources we think will be needed to ensure the strength and viability of the new Super-department.

**Mission of a new super-department**

In addition to the complementary background and training in psychological sciences (which is shared by most, though not all, HD faculty and PSYCH faculty), the subcommittee identified two shared broad characteristics of scholarship in the two groups: an emphasis on ecology and interdisciplinarity. Both HD and PSYCH have a history of adopting an ecological perspective in our scholarship and both units exhibit interdisciplinarity. HD is explicitly an interdisciplinary field; while most of the faculty have a Ph.D. in psychology, others have degrees in sociology and political science. Both HD and PSYCH faculty tackle a diverse array of questions across psychological science and human development, embracing different levels of analysis, methods, and approaches. Beyond these common themes and backgrounds, the two units share considerable overlap in their current research foci and themes.

On the other hand, the subcommittee recognizes that the two departments have different histories, cultures, traditions, and visions. While PSYCH focuses on the investigation of behavior and its cognitive, social, neural, and hormonal underpinnings in the full range of environmental situations, HD aims to advance knowledge in human development for individual, family, and community well-being. Also specific to HD is the emphasis on a lifespan perspective and the scholarship of translational research. We believe it is critical to acknowledge these differences, preserve unique strengths of both units, and establish mutual acceptance and respect in order
to build synergy and cohesion in the new super-department. We kept these principles in mind when considering a potential new structure of the new entity.

HD is not a subfield of psychology, and not all psychologists study development. The unique elements of each group present an opportunity to create a large and diverse department in the space of psychological science that covers many more areas than either unit currently does alone. It also raises the possibility of building a department in the psychology space that would not only strengthen the discipline of psychology at Cornell, but also exhibit more interdisciplinarity than is common for psychology departments, and to raise the profile of Human Development scholarship as well.

However, a new super-department also presents several challenges. Foremost among them is ensuring that each group’s unique history and strengths will be supported and maintained. For HD, which is consistently ranked as the top Human Development department in the country according to Academic Analytics reports, that would mean a strong and visible program in human development that would be protected as a permanent part of the new department, with hiring influence, resources, and external visibility. In terms of resources, there would have to be departmental funds allocated specifically to supporting the HD mission and program, where hiring, research, and student training will continue to be across disciplinary boundaries.

We discussed how a “virtual” super-department, wherein the two groups would be joined via a website of psychological science but would retain the same autonomy that each group currently enjoys (similar to Vanderbilt’s organization; and to a 2014 HD-Psych committee recommendation), is not in line with the charge from the Provost because it does not show meaningful integration and coordination in terms of scholarship, faculty hiring, undergraduate teaching, and graduate student training and recruitment.

The subcommittee therefore discussed a departmental structure where there would be more integration, and where HD and PSYCH faculty would work together on all aspects of departmental functioning and where the main areas or questions of scholarship would reflect the interests and strengths of both HD and PSYCH faculty. We agreed that it would make sense to have vertical areas of concentration in traditional psychological science, including but not necessarily limited to: cognition & perception, social & personality, developmental, and neuroscience (as illustrated in the sketch below). We’d like to note that these are not names that we think are finalized; these are possible ideas for the larger faculty to discuss. How might these vertical areas work? The idea would be that each faculty member would choose a primary vertical area with which to affiliate, and would be centrally involved in faculty hiring and graduate student admissions decisions in that vertical area. Faculty members would be encouraged, however, to affiliate with more than one vertical area and, indeed, the committee thought that cross-pollination across vertical areas of both HD and PSYCH faculty would be optimal for ensuring integration and for breaking down some of the traditional barriers in psychological science.
In addition to these vertical areas, further integration and coherence of the new super-department would be advanced by having strong horizontal structures as well, centered around particular questions or themes. A strong horizontal structure consisting of an HD program would be paramount, and this area would span all the verticals. There would also be a program in Psychology, HD, and Law, as this now exists in the HD Department. There might also be a program in Neuroscience (and perhaps eventually this could become a cross-department program, to align with the white paper on neuroscience that faculty in Psychology put forward last year), and one in Health and Well-being. Again, these could be discussed and considered along with other possibilities (e.g., a program on judgment and decision making).

![Possible Super-Department Structure](image)

**Graduate Training:** Students could receive degrees in Psychology, Human Development, or Law & HD/Psychology.

**Hiring:** Faculty would be hired in areas of recognized greatest need, by vertical and horizontal intersections. Ideally, faculty would be able to contribute to more than one training area. The Program in HD will retain its 24 lines (per its CHE affiliation).

*Dashed lines are speculative areas*

Exactly how hiring decisions would be made will be a conversation for the larger faculty, but the assumption is that hiring decisions would also be made with these horizontal programs in mind. In this way, the faculty will discuss what areas or questions to pursue, and there would be resources (lines) dedicated to those areas. In this way, hiring would be a decision made by the
entire faculty, with an eye toward strengthening both the vertical areas as well as the horizontal themes/programs.

The subcommittee talked extensively about the name of the new department, and how the name should be broad enough to reflect faculty from both units. Here is a list of some names we discussed, but this will need to be a discussion among the larger group.

- Department of Psychological Science
- Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences
- Department of Psychology and Human Development
- Department of Basic and Translational Psychology
- Department of Psychological and Developmental Sciences
- Department of Integrative Behavioral Sciences

There are pros and cons for each new name and multiple objectives to consider. The name should make all faculty members feel supported and it should accurately reflect to the outside world the intellectual focus of the super-department. The name must also advance the stated goal of increasing the strength and prominence of the discipline of psychology at Cornell over the next 10-15 years and beyond.

With this goal in mind, the subcommittee recognizes that the name should signal to the outside world the unique strength and vision of the new psychological science entity at Cornell that is forward-thinking and in alignment with the future direction of social sciences.

**Undergraduate Teaching**

The subcommittee agreed that a new super-department would be incredibly beneficial for undergraduate teaching. Because of our complementary approaches, we already have courses that are cross-listed, and most or all of them probably should be and would be easily part of a new super-department. We discussed the possibility of offering three undergraduate majors: Psychology, Human Development, and Cognitive Science (Morten Christiansen and Tamar Kushnir are currently putting through a request to make this a cross-college major).

We also currently have minors in both psychology and HD, and these would continue.

We also discussed what the HD major might look like if CHE becomes a college of public policy. For example, would the majority of pre-medical students who now major in HD change if the respective college becomes policy-focused? We discussed concerns that if the CHE became a college of public policy, the HD major would not remain as strong because most of the HD students are pre-med and many are interested in basic science. There is a concern that students may not apply to a policy school to major in psychology or human development.

There would have to be broad faculty discussion and a committee on undergraduate teaching.
**Graduate Admissions and Training**

We discussed how graduate students might be recruited into this new department. HD adopts a system where graduate students are allocated based on Principal Investigator (hereafter “PI”)-needs. Each HD faculty member receives a score reflecting the need, each faculty member assesses what applicants have the appropriate skills and background for the PI’s research program, and then applicants are allocated based on that need. In Psychology, the number of grad student packages is split evenly across the three traditional areas (Perception, Cognition and Development; Social and Personality; and Behavioral and Evolutionary Neuroscience), and within each area, the faculty discuss individual faculty needs and allocate slots accordingly. We discussed how this decision-making might be coordinated across a large group of 40+ faculty, and agreed that this is a tractable issue to be decided on by the full faculty.

As far as PhDs offered in the program, there was consensus in the committee that we would offer a PhD in Psychology, one in HD, one in Law/HD/Psych, and possibly one in Neuroscience.

**Governance**

The default assumption is that there would be one Chair of this new unit. In the first few years, perhaps the chair would rotate from HD to PSYCH faculty, although the hope is that this may be only a temporary arrangement. We also discussed the need for a robust and representative executive committee that would contain the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Graduate Studies, and both HD and PSYCH faculty.

**Strategic Investment**

*Hiring.* New hiring is requested to bridge the two units and facilitate integration. Some aspects of the mission in each group will be unbalanced in the new department. For example, behavioral and evolutionary neuroscience would need new hires. Certain “horizontal” programs, such as the Law, Psychology, and Human Development program, and the Aging area in the Human Development program would need new hires to create critical mass in those programs/areas and make them strong and viable. The requests for new hires would need to be decided on by the full faculty in the new super-department, and faculty would consider new hires that would both bolster our existing strengths and structures, and create new strengths in areas that are seen as future growth areas (e.g., social network research; data science; health and clinical science) in psychological and developmental sciences. New hiring will be critical to the public “launch” of the new super-department and might involve an attention-grabbing cluster hire.

*Current faculty lines.* The subcommittee is unanimous in requesting that the overall faculty size of the super-department equal at least the combined number of existing faculty lines in the two departments (24 HD lines and 19 PSYCH lines).
Co-Location. The subcommittee is unanimous in believing that any new department will need common space. The success of trying to create a new unit out of two groups will depend on faculty from each unit being able to see each other frequently and share the same space. The subcommittee contends that this new super-department can succeed only if we are co-located. Without colocation, the super-department would be in danger of being little more than a new name and a new website, albeit with the additional burdens of managing things like graduate applications and hiring decisions across substantial physical distance. We are aware that colocation would not be easy, with one obvious cost issue being that the PSYCH animal labs are in Uris while the functional magnetic resonance imaging (hereafter “fMRI”) magnet is in Martha Van Rensselaer (hereafter “MVR”). Colocation therefore requires that something expensive be moved or replaced. Also, HD faculty will finally move to their newly renovated space in MVR at the beginning of this summer. After many disruptive moves over the years, there is an understandable reluctance among the faculty to move again.

Open issues

The following are several issues about which the subcommittee (and in consultation with HD and PSYCH faculty members) could not reach agreement. There would have to be careful, mutually respectful discussions going forward in order to address these complicated issues.

Need for a super-department: There is a question among some faculty members about whether a new super-department of the kind we describe in this report is needed. For that reason, some faculty members strongly prefer the “virtual” solution that was proposed in the 2014 report by a joint HD-PSYCH faculty committee.

Name of the new entity: A critical issue is the name for the new super-department. We talked extensively about the name and how it should be broad enough to reflect faculty from both units. The HD faculty believe that it is crucial to have the name of the new super-department reflect the strengths and identities of both HD and PSYCH. Therefore, their view is that a broad and inclusive name (“Department of Psychology and Human Development”) would make all faculty members feel supported. The PSYCH faculty recognize and see the need for a more inclusive name, but believe that the name of a psychology department that also refers to human development will make the department less visible and influential in the disciplinary psychology space and in the neuroscience space.

Voting: The two current departments have different traditions of whether voting is secret or public. There are good and persuasive reasons on both sides for these traditions and norms, and the faculty in each department strongly favor of keeping their own current tradition. This is an issue that would need careful discussion.

Co-location: HD and PSYCH departments have different ideas about how co-location should be solved. Whereas HD faculty would understandably want to remain close to the fMRI center currently housed in MVR, the PSYCH faculty understandably want to remain close to their
animal labs which are currently located in Uris Hall. It should be noted that the one HD faculty member who currently works with nonhuman animals has their rodents housed in the Weill Hall vivarium.

Note: Additional feedback from the departments about the prospect of a super-department is available upon request.