Chapter 8

The Explosive Growth of Psychology, 1960-1981:  
The Douglass College Psychology Department

The shaping of the psychology department at Douglass College during the 1960’s and 1970’s has its historical roots in Sidney Cook’s emphasis on child development in the undergraduate curriculum at NJC, and on hands-on experiences for students enrolled in courses on child behavior. In Cook’s undergraduate curriculum (described in Chapter 4) students were given hands-on experiences in on-campus facilities — NJC’s Child Study Center and an observation room Cook built in the Botany Building — and field work in an extensive network of off-campus schools and children’s hospitals. After Cook’s death in 1943, Richardson continued to offer courses in child development but with less emphasis on a hands-on component in teaching these courses.

Cook’s vision was revived and enlarged when Jean Burton joined the faculty in 1955. Burton made use of Cook’s observation room in the Botany Building and also sent students to outside day care centers to observe children. What Burton also wanted was an on-campus facility — nursery or day care for teaching and research — a facility Douglass had not had since 1932 when NJC’s Child Study Center was closed because of the financial problems occasioned by the Depression. With her efforts and those of other faculty hired in the 1960’s, the Douglass Psychology Department established its own Nursery School (later named the Douglass Day Care Center) for undergraduate and graduate teaching, and for research in child development.

One of the most important developments for psychology at Douglass College in the early 1960’s was the construction of Davison Hall to house the college’s Psychology Department and Nursery School. The justification to the state of New Jersey for funding the construction of Davison Hall included the fact that psychology had the largest number of majors at the college.
Burton, in her oral history to me, described psychology’s initial plans for the building, as well as the difficulties and disappointments the department experienced before the building was finally constructed. In the initial plan, psychology would have two thirds of the space in the building and home economics would have one third of the space. With this allocation, psychology was able to plan sufficient research space for faculty, for well-equipped undergraduate laboratories, and for classrooms (of which there was a general shortage on the Douglass Campus). However, when home economics complained of their allocation to the college administration, they were given about 60% of the space. In order to retrieve the space psychology needed, Forgays, with the help of Burton and Bernard Guernsey (Director of the Clinic), obtained a matching fund of $108,000 from NIH for the enlargement of Davison Hall. The rationale stated in the grant proposal to NIH was the plan to devote considerable space to clinical and child research. This was the rationale for having the Nursery School in the building and also for locating the Psychological Clinic in Davison. In the end, psychology occupied about half the building but with some loss of the research and classroom facilities in

Davison Hall. Psychology Department at Douglass College, 1964-2001  (Photo by Linda King)
the original plan. The construction of Davison Hall was completed in 1964.

Facilities in Davison Hall for the clinical program included observation rooms with one-way mirrors, interview rooms, a seminar room, the Psychological Clinic, and an office for the Director of Clinical Training. In all, the facilities were very good (Bert Cohen, personal communication). The clinical program remained in Davison until 1974 when it moved to the new Psychology Building on the Busch Campus.

There were several important additions to the Douglass faculty in the 1960’s. They included Edith Neimark (b. 1928) who arrived in 1963, Albert Goss (b. 1923) in 1966, Sandra Harris (b. 1942) in 1969, and Carolyn Rovee (b. 1942) in 1970. In the ensuing years, they all made significant contributions to the child development program at Rutgers.

The Day Care Center came under Goss’s supervision and he did much to make the center a locus for the psychological study of the child. Before Goss’s arrival, and with no staff of its own, operation of the Nursery School in Davison was limited for the first 2-3 years of its existence. When a half-time line was obtained for a nursery-school teacher, the Nursery School was able to expand its activities and hours of operation, and was able to care for up to 25 preschoolers. Goss added a one-credit course on day care to the undergraduate curriculum. He also enhanced other undergraduate offerings in child development. Goss developed the center’s facilities, which included an observation room, so that it could serve as the laboratory component of courses in child psychology as well as field-level courses.

The Douglass Psychology Department with the center as a resource for teaching and research became the primary locus of the graduate program in child development in 1967. Davison Hall housed the Douglass Psychology Department until the unification of psychology in 1981. Even with psychology no longer at Davison (it now houses the university’s Philosophy Department), the Douglass Day Care Center continues to operate in the building.
A second major children’s facility at Douglass emerged during the 1970’s under Harris’s leadership. She came to Douglass with a primary interest in the development of a clinical and research facility for autistic children. Initially, she sent undergraduates to outside facilities to study these children. In collaboration with a private rehabilitative center for children with learning and other psychological disabilities, the Midland School, the department established the Child Behavioral Research and Learning Center for autistic children on the Douglass Campus, with Harris as its Director. The stated objectives of the center were to train undergraduate and graduate students to work with children with serious behavior problems, to conduct research on treatment, and to provide an educational experience for children who are unable to benefit from the usual classroom experience. One of the parents who had an autistic child in the Midland School was impressed with Harris’s work and contributed resources from his contracting firm to build two trailers for the center. The trailers were located within a couple of blocks of Davison.
Harris was highly successful in attracting funds for the operation of the center, which led in turn to the willingness of the college and university to provide more substantial housing for the school on the Douglass Campus. The school was renamed the Developmental Disability Center (DDC), with Harris continuing as its director.

Initially the department contributed to the DDC by releasing part of Harris’s time to the center. The DDC eventually became self-supporting with no lines supplied by the university. Harris hired a full-time teacher, Jan Handelman, an EdD, to also serve as the center’s principal. The DDC also provided several assistantships for students in the graduate program. Like the Day Care Center, DDC was a locus for undergraduate and graduate training and research. Research for many undergraduate theses, MA theses, and PhD dissertations in developmental psychology were conducted at the Day Care Center and at DDC. DDC has since also acquired a substantial building of its own adjacent to the Douglass Campus.
There were also disappointments in the expansion of developmental psychology at Douglass. Some of these disappointments were echoed by Neimark, who replaced Hanawalt as department chair upon his retirement in 1966. In her annual report of the department for 1967-68, Neimark describes a failed alliance with the Graduate School of Education for a graduate program in Special Education and a rejection by the Public Health Service for a training grant in developmental psychology. Public Health cited the small number of developmental psychologists on the faculty, which was indeed the case in the late 1960’s. A decade later, Burton’s forward-looking proposal to the Douglass College Dean for a “life span research center” also failed to come to fruition. Burton’s plan for such a center was “to bring together...the various child research services...scattered around the Douglass campus,” “to establish a gerontological research laboratory,” and to do “basic research, human and animal, in learning, cognition and perception [to] truly cover the life span.”

Faculty interests in the Douglass department were by no means limited to children. In the early 1960’s Hanawalt and Forgays were both active in experimental psychology and were among the first faculty members to supervise doctoral dissertations in that area. A number of young, promising faculty with interests in a variety of topical areas of experimental psychology were recruited after

Sandra Harris, joined the Douglass faculty in 1969, founded the Developmental Disability Center on the Douglass Campus in the 1970’s, and served as its director. (2006 photo taken by Nick Romaneko)
Hanawalt’s retirement and Forgay’s departure to the University of Vermont in 1964. Among those who remained were: Marilyn Shaw (1944-1983), a cognitive psychologist with research interests in mathematical modeling; Eileen Kowler (b. 1952), another cognitive psychologist with research interests in vision; Richard Lore (1934-2007), a comparative psychologist. Shaw’s promising research career was tragically cut short by her premature death at the age of 39. An annual award “for excellence in undergraduate research in psychology,” was established in her name.

Lore served as chairman from 1971 to 1975, when Burton took over until unification of the discipline in 1981, when the position of college departmental chair was abolished. The annual reports to the Douglass Dean from these two chairs, as well as from Neimark before them, are peppered with complaints about inequities between Douglass faculty and those at other colleges. In the 1966-67 report, Neimark noted that the department was experiencing too high a turnover due to low salaries, poor research support, and a high teaching load when compared with the men’s college. These problems were echoed again by Lore in his 1971-72 report. Burton’s report in 1977-78 detailed the severe lack of research space available in Davison, this in spite of the space that had become available when the clinic moved out of Davison in 1974. Research labs for the department’s research-active faculty were becoming scattered on the Douglass Campus and the search for adequate facilities was frustrating.

The inequities at Douglass relative to the resources at the men’s college that the chairs complained about likely reflected differences in the way the central administration of the university viewed the needs of the different colleges. Their view was conditioned in part by the self-view of the colleges. Douglass College viewed itself as primarily an undergraduate college with a limited role in graduate training and research. The mission of the college was to provide an undergraduate curriculum and student life for women, on a par with leading women’s colleges in America. Still, Burton, in her oral history to me, described the Douglass deans she dealt with during her tenure as department chair as trying their best to provide psychology with adequate space for faculty research. As an example, in response to one of Burton’s pleas for research space, Dean Cobb appealed to the university’s Space Allocation Committee, citing the fact that psychology is “one of the top priority departments at Douglass [with] research-active faculty members...and has encouraged its young faculty — all of whom are grant recipients.” (Dean Cobb’s memo to the committee, 1/24/78)
Psychology’s rigorous curriculum, described in the next section, certainly supported the Douglass undergraduate mission even as its faculty aspired to participate fully in the graduate program.

The Undergraduate Curriculum and Major

Hands-on experience was an integral part of the courses in child development dating back to the 1930’s. By the 1950’s courses in Vocational Guidance, Abnormal Psychology, and Tests and Measurements also featured either field trips or “an original experiment.” By the beginning of the 1970’s, as the curriculum gradually expanded, a three-hour laboratory component was added to many of the new offerings. By the end of the decade, the laboratory was part of the courses in Learning, Perception, Cognition, Thinking (Neimark’s specialty) with optional lab, Language and Meaning, Mathematical Models, and Theories of Personality. And in the Douglass tradition, most of the courses in developmental psychology were enriched with an experiential component, either in the laboratory or in field observation. They included Child Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, Adulthood and Ageing, Day Care and Early Education (Goss’s specialty), Developmental Disabilities (Harris’s specialty), Atypical Child, and Behavior Disorders in Children. Most of these courses were not available at the other colleges. The undergraduate at Douglass was indeed treated to a rich fare of psychology topics.

The requirements for the major were rigorous. Dating back to the 1950’s students were urged to take courses both in zoology and sociology to satisfy the distribution requirements of the Liberal Arts curriculum “since psychology views man as a biological organism adjusting to a physical and social environment.” (NJC catalogs of the 1950’s) By the 1960’s the outside requirements were more specific in urging 12 hours in the “sciences other than psychology and in mathematics.” (Douglass College catalog 1960-61)

Requirements within psychology were frequently revised as it became possible to offer an increasingly varied curriculum. During the 1950’s, a requirement within psychology was a one-year course in Experimental Psychology with a lab and an “original research project.” By 1960, a Comparative Psychology course with lab was available as an alternative to Experimental Psychology. Within a couple of years, a course in Statistics and Research Design was required. By the mid-1960’s an additional course in one of the basic areas was added as a requirement: Learning and Motivation, Verbal Behavior, Perception, or a course in Contemporary Psychological Problems — all with an
individual research project required. By the 1970’s Experimental Psychology was no longer offered; instead a course in Learning and a course in Perception and Cognition was described in the catalog as equivalent to “traditional experimental laboratory courses required of majors elsewhere.” The final revision, reflecting shifts in psychology at large, was the split of Perception and Cognition into two courses, with the student able to choose any two of the three experimental courses: Learning, Perception, Cognition.