At least 1.5 million students take an introductory psychology class every year in the United States (Cush & Buskist, 1997; Griggs, Jackson, Christopher, & Marek, 1999; Miller & Gentile, 1998) and Perlman and McCann (1999) report that 97% of colleges and universities offered an introductory psychology course in 1997. Students who enroll in an introductory psychology course are not necessarily psychology majors. In fact, a 1973 study by Kulik noted that only 6% of students in introductory psychology courses were psychology majors. Students who were not psychology majors take introductory psychology to fulfill a prerequisite for another major, to complete a general education requirement in the social sciences, or simply as an elective.

For most students, introductory psychology is the only course in the field of psychology they will take (Buskist, Miller, Ecott, & Critchfield, 1999). Since this is the only exposure to the field, the comprehensiveness, depth, and accuracy of the topics covered are of particular importance. Little or no representation of a particular section of psychology, substantial errors in describing the subfield, or an absence of recent research citations could indicate that a particular subfield is not accepted or respected in the psychological community (Herzog, 1986; Roig, Icochea, & Cuzzucoli, 1991).

The combination of topics taught in an introductory psychology class can also shape the students’ impression of psychology. These early impressions often affect the students’ decision to major in psychology and the area of psychology that becomes the focus of their study (Buskist et al., 1999; Maynard, Bachiochi, & Luna, 2002).

I-O psychology was established as Division 14 of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1946 as industrial and business psychology (Koppes, n.d.). Since then, I-O psychology has been an officially recognized course of study within the psychological community. In a 1984 study, 25% of liberal arts colleges and 61% of universities offered I-O psychology classes (Carlson & Millard, 1984). In 1997, Perlman and McCann (1999) found that 44% of colleges and universities offered I-O psychology classes. Therefore, coverage of I-O psychology in introductory psychology textbooks should be expected. However, I-O psychology usually receives little or no coverage (Griggs & Jackson, 1996). In fact, Griggs and Jackson found that the percentage of applied psychology (including I-O psychology) represented in Hilgard et al.’s introductory psychology textbook decreased from 7% in the 1953 first edition, to 4% in the 1957 second edition, to 3% in the 1962 third edition, to 0% in the fourth thorough tenth editions spanning the years 1967 to 1990.
Griggs, Jackson, and Napolitano (1994) found that only 4 of the 11 introductory psychology textbooks they studied had applied psychology content. For those four books, the percentage of text that covered applied psychology was 2.4%, 4.1%, 5.9%, and 6.5%. Hilgard et al.’s text as well as other introductory psychology texts that exclude I-O psychology are denying students access to the full breadth of psychology as well as omitting a field that is of interest to many.

Inclusion of I-O psychology material in an introductory psychology textbook is important because the exposure to I-O psychology will allow students to make well-informed decisions about possibly taking future I-O psychology courses (Maynard et al., 2002). Carlson and Millard’s (1984) study measured the treatment of I-O topics in introductory psychology textbooks, which is the only previous study that could be found that focused only on the representation of I-O psychology in introductory psychology textbooks. Although the article does not provide a lot of detail about the study, the results show that I-O psychology was not adequately covered in introductory psychology textbooks in the 1980s. Carlson and Millard found that .4% of the text in the introductory psychology textbooks was devoted to I-O psychology.

In a study of undergraduate psychology departments, Miller and Gentile (1998) found that four topics, one of which was I-O psychology, were assigned by very few professors even though they rated them as important topics. In addition, most introductory psychology textbooks do not include full chapter coverage of I-O psychology. Instead, the textbooks integrate the information into the text (Griggs et al., 1999). The scattering of information on I-O psychology makes it difficult for a professor to teach I-O psychology as an organized and unified topic.

Due to the importance of the introductory psychology textbooks and the representation of the field of I-O psychology in those textbooks, the intent of the current study was to analyze the breadth and depth of the treatment of I-O psychology in introductory psychology textbooks over a 6-year period from 1997–2003. The current study was based on Carlson and Millard’s (1984) research to see if the representation of I-O psychology has changed since the 1980s.

**Method**

**Materials**

Introductory psychology textbooks with publication dates later than 1997 were collected from a variety of sources. A list of 69 introductory psychology textbooks was assembled using Internet searches of textbook publishers and 60 (87%) of those books were acquired. The textbooks were borrowed from psychology professors or acquired through the school library.
**Procedure**

The researchers recorded data about each textbook on a score sheet. The total number of text pages was recorded by writing down the page number of the last page of the text before the supplementary materials such as the appendices, glossary, or index.

To evaluate the specific amount of I-O psychology content, the procedure involved starting with the index of each textbook. The following terms were used: industrial, organizational, and industrial-organizational psychology. It should be noted that the utilization of an index search could have left out some I-O material. However, Chatman and Goetz (1985) found that using textbook indexes was a valid method and this method has been used in other research. The pages listed in the index were then scanned for I-O psychology material, as well as up to five pages on either side of the listing for content related to I-O psychology. The number of pages with content relating to I-O psychology was recorded by counting each page with any I-O related information as identified by the search terms above. A list of 37 commonly used terms in I-O psychology was compiled and the researchers noted when these terms were present in the pages examined.

Finally, the researchers noted if the terms industrial psychology, organizational psychology, or industrial-organizational psychology were included in the glossary. This was done because often when people have a question about a term they go to the glossary in the textbook.

To increase reliability of the results, two researchers evaluated each book and the results were compared. Inter-rater reliability was found for most of the books (93%) and where there were inconsistencies the judges went back and re-reviewed the books until they had 100% agreement.

**Results**

An analysis of the introductory psychology textbooks found that 49 (68%) of the 60 textbooks examined contained some I-O psychology content. The mean number of overall pages in the textbooks was 597.68 (SD = 100.66) and the mean number of pages containing I-O content was 3.97 (SD = 4.75) for all of the books and 4.86 (SD = 4.83) for the books containing some I-O material. The percentage of pages that contained I-O content was .7% for all the books, which was an increase from the percentage (.4%) found by Carlson and Millard (1984).

Four of the books (6.6%) contained a significant amount of I-O psychology material by devoting a chapter or appendix to I-O psychology. Davis and Palladino (2002) were the only authors to devote a chapter in the text exclusively about I-O psychology.

Another five books (8.3%) had I-O psychology material as part of an applied psychology chapter or appendix. Those are:


The most commonly found terms that related to I-O psychology were motivation, selection, job satisfaction, leadership, and training. Analysis of the glossaries of the introductory psychology textbooks revealed that 58 of the general psychology books contained a glossary and three (5.17%) of the glossaries contained entries for only industrial psychology, one (1.72%) contained the term organizational psychology, 26 (44.83%) contained the term industrial-organizational psychology, and 28 (48.13%) did not contain any of these terms.

**Discussion**

The results of this research indicate a slight increase in the percentage of pages in introductory psychology textbooks that contain I-O psychology material. This finding is positive, and we hope to find that the percentage of pages continues to increase. Since Carlson and Millard’s study (1984), the mean number of total pages in introductory psychology textbooks has increased, but the number of topics covered in introductory psychology textbooks has also increased, which could account for the limited increase in the percentage of pages with I-O material (Griggs, et al., 1999).

Even though I-O psychologists make up 5% of the psychologists in the United States (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2003), our research project confirmed that I-O psychology still receives little or no coverage in introductory psychology texts. SIOP members can help to change this. One way to do this is to have SIOP officials contact the current textbook authors to see what they can do to help the author(s) include I-O psychology in their textbook. The number of authors for introductory psychology textbooks has decreased,
reflecting a movement towards textbooks with a single author. Single authors could have trouble remaining current with all the topics in psychology (Griggs, et al., 1999). This inability of single authors to keep up with all areas of psychology could be one of the reasons that I-O psychology is often left out of textbooks. Another way that SIOP can possibly change the current dismal statistics is to promote to all psychology professors the I-O activities for introductory psychology courses that are explained in detail on the SIOP Web site (http://siop.org/Instruct/inGuide.htm). One of the challenges in teaching the introductory psychology course is that the instructor must have current knowledge in all the areas of psychology. Finally, SIOP members that teach general psychology can help by adopting only textbooks that contain I-O psychology.

References


