"That's Psychology?" A Simple Strategy for Expanding Students' Perceptions of Psychology

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Problem: No matter how many examples we give, students struggle to articulate the diversity of topics within psychology and the many applications of psychology knowledge and skills.

Solution: I created the "divisions" assignment to engage introduction to psychology students in the process of discovering the breadth and applications of psychology at the start of the semester.

Assignment for Introduction to Psychology
Students review the list of Divisions on the American Psychological Association (APA) webpage (https://www.apa.org/about/division) and

1. Identify one division that *interests* them.
2. Identify one division they are *surprised* to see within a psychological association.
3. For each division chosen, follow the links to find the information needed to provide
   o The division number and name
   o A one-sentence description of the division purpose or mission (in their own words).
   o The name of the current division president.
   o The titles and types (e.g., journal, bulletin, newsletter) of publications.
   o Topics included within the division.
   o Student membership information.
4. Explain why the "interesting" division is of interest, why the "surprising" division was a surprise, and if they are still surprised after reading the information on the website.

The day the assignment is due, we discuss their interests and surprises. Through this discussion, I

1. Connect their interests and surprises to topics we will discuss during the semester.
2. Identify and clarify misconceptions about psychology.
3. Give examples of the career paths alumni have pursued that align with division topics.

Assignment Modifications for a Careers Course
In addition to identifying divisions of interest and divisions that surprise them, students in my careers course identify divisions that align with their career interests.

Assignment Modifications for Content Courses
This assignment can be modified for any content course by asking students to identify divisions related to the course topic. For example, students in a lifespan development course could search for divisions related to the course (e.g., Division 7 Developmental Psychology, Division 20 Adult Development and Aging, and Division 53 Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology). The specific types of information identified for each division can be tailored to connect with other course assignments. For example, students might be instructed to search division webpages to find topics for a presentation or to identify division journals to locate sources for a research paper.