

## STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY FORM

Program Name: Master of Arts

Dept: Political Science

College: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Submitted by: Dr. Jeff Ashley, Professor and Graduate Coordinator

### Part 1:

CGS Learning Goal #1 A depth of content knowledge	Program Learning Goal(s): The student will demonstrate content knowledge in their primary area of study
How are learners assessed?	<p>Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate content knowledge when students defend their theses or present their capstone projects. The rubric specifically addresses this objective, applying a 4-point scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 above average, 2 satisfactory, 1 unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Three questions on the assessment tap this area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of social science methods</li><li>• Knowledge of scholarly literature/appropriate sources</li><li>• Knowledge of their area of research or policy problem</li></ul> <p>The maximum score on this scale would be 12, the minimum would be 3.</p>
What are the expectations for the students?	Since students are completing their graduate degrees we expect that the average rating for all students during the assessment period would be at least 9 on the combined measures assessing content knowledge, which is above average.
What are the expectations for the program?	<p>50% of the students completing capstones will receive an assessment on content of at least ten on a scale of twelve on content knowledge.</p> <p>80% will receive a score of at least 9 out of 12 on content knowledge.</p> <p>No student will receive a combined score lower than 6 out of 12.</p>
What were the results?	The overall content score was 9.86 for students completing the capstone/thesis from October 0f 2023-October of 2025.

	Of the 25 students completing capstones, 17 of them scored a ten or above. That's 68%. 21 students out of 25 scored at least a nine out of 12. That translates to 80%. One student scored a 4.3
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chair and the Department's Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. Results will be used to guide future curriculum and program development.
CGS Learning Goal #2: Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	Program Learning Goal(s): The student will demonstrate the ability to think and write critically
How are learners assessed?	<p><b><u>Thesis Defense/ Capstone Assessment Rubric</u></b></p> <p>Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate critical thinking skills when students defend theses or present capstone projects. The rubric specifically addresses this objective, applying a 4-point scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 above average, 2 satisfactory, 1 unsatisfactory.</p> <p>The Department's graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year, upon completion of a thesis defense, or capstone presentation.</p>
What are the expectations for the students?	Since students are completing their graduate degrees, we expect that the average rating for all students would be at least 3, or above average.
What are the expectations for the program?	At least 80% of students will score a 3 or above on critical thinking skills.
What were the results?	<p>The overall average score for critical thinking was 3.2 among students who completed a capstone/thesis in the assessment period.</p> <p>Of the 25 students who completed a capstone in the prior academic year, 17 of them had an average score of 3 or higher – 68%.</p>

How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chair and the Department's Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. Results will be used to guide future curriculum and program development.
CGS Learning Goal #3: Effective oral and written communication skills	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will develop the ability to communicate orally and through written work the concepts appropriate for graduate studies in political science.
How are learners assessed?	Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate oral communication skills and writing skills when students defend their theses or present their capstone projects. The rubric specifically addresses this objective, applying a 4-point scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 above average, 2 satisfactory, 1 unsatisfactory.  The Department's graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year as thesis defenses and exams are scheduled.
What are the expectations for the students?	Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students during the academic year would be at least 3 on oral communication and writing skills, which is above average.
What are the expectations for the program?	At least 80% of our students will score a 3 or above on oral communication. At least 80% of our students will score a 3 or above on written communication. At least 50% will receive a combined score of six or seven on both dimensions of communication included in the assessment.
What were the results?	17 of 25 students received an average score of three or higher on oral communication – that's 68% of the sample. 19 of 25 students received an average score of three or higher on written communication – 76% of the sample. 18 of 25 students received a combined score of six or higher on oral and written communication – 72% of the sample.
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chair and the Department's Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission

	to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. Results will be used to guide future curriculum and program development.
CGS Learning Goal #4: Evidence of advanced scholarship through research and/or creative activity.	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will use the research skills they have learned in the program to disseminate their research through appropriate avenues for social science scholars.
How are learners assessed?	To assess our students' ability to present research at professional conferences and publish their writing in professional academic outlets, including publications in academic journals, book chapters, book reviews, or encyclopedia entries.  Throughout the year, the graduate coordinator collects data on all graduate student research presentations and publications. External editors, reviewers, conference organizers, and discussants evaluate graduate student research.
What are the expectations for the students?	Students are to collaborate with faculty to produce work suitable for publication or presentation. Students will seek out opportunities to present their work at local/regional conferences with the mentorship of the faculty. Students will apply for Williams Travel Grants to make conference participation possible. Students will win awards at EIU or other organizations for scholarly activity.
What are the expectations for the program?	We expect 10% of our students to present at a conference, win a research award or research grant, or have a publication. With an average enrollment over the two years at roughly 40 students, this percentage would result in 4 students participating in these research activities. For a two year evaluation, this number should be 8.
What were the results?	During the assessment period, we had one student present at a conference. We fell well short of our goal regarding research activity.
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. Given the costs of presenting, and the diverse students in our two programs, we need to do something difference. This will be discussed in part 3.
CGS Learning Goal #5: Ethics and Professional Responsibility	Program Learning Goal(s): The graduate candidate demonstrates an understanding and respect for professional ethics in the discipline.

How are learners assessed?	Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate professional ethics when students defend their theses or present their capstone projects. The rubric specifically addresses this objective, applying a 4-point scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 above average, 2 satisfactory, 1 unsatisfactory.
What are the expectations for the students?	Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students during the academic year would be at least 3 on professional ethics, which is above average.
What are the expectations for the program?	At least 50% of the students who graduate from the Public Administration/Public Policy option will successfully complete the course on PA Ethics or Civic and Nonprofit Leadership, which contains a module on ethical leadership.
What were the results?	Of the 25 students who completed the capstone, 24 of them scored at least a 3 on the assessment for professional ethics – 96% of the sample. Of the 16 students who graduated with the PA/Policy option during the assessment period 13 of them completed either the public administration ethics course or the civic/nonprofit leadership course. Only 3/16 had not taken either course.
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. Discussion about students being encouraged to enroll in PA Ethics and finding ways to integrate ethics throughout other courses.

## Part 2

**Describe what your program's assessment accomplishments since your last report was submitted. Discuss ways in which you have responded to the Graduate Assessment Summary Response from last year's report or simply describe what assessment work was initiated, continued, or completed.**

In all honesty, it appears that we have continued to do what we always have done in terms of assessment. Our numbers have generally been strong and we have received favorable reviews. The numbers this time have revealed some problems. In terms of things that were changed as a result of our previous assessment response, we are routinely offering the PA Ethics course and we have initiated a path to degree completion apart from the traditional capstone or thesis option. Previously they had two options: a capstone or a thesis project. We noticed several students seemed to get stuck at this stage and never completed their degree even though they have finished all the coursework. To remedy this, we added two more pathways for completion. One is an internship that would result in a shorter paper summarizing the work completed and tying the experience back to class concepts. The other is taking additional coursework – moving the number of credits needed to graduate from 33 to 36 for students who wish to take this route. Students pursuing this option submit a portfolio of their work to be assessed by the committee. So far we do not have anyone who has graduated under either of the alternate paths and are unsure if the current assessment rubric will be applicable.

### Part 3

**Summarize changes and improvements in curriculum, instruction, and learning that have resulted from the implementation of your assessment program. How have you used the data? What have you learned? In light of what you have learned through your assessment efforts this year and in past years, what are your plans for the future?**

- A closer look at the data reveals that our evaluators are in disagreement as to what constitutes a ranking on the capstone/thesis rubric. For example, one student received rankings of excellent, above average, and satisfactory by the three reviewers on the same question. We also had a faculty member who tended to rate everyone as satisfactory on everything. We would benefit from departmental training and the development of written guidelines to follow when doing the assessment.
- Regarding research conferences: conference travel funding is limited, and many of our graduate students cannot afford to pay for their own travel expenses. We may need to reconsider how we evaluate this professional preparation. We also seem to fall short in our oral component. This is partly due to the fact that our on-line PA/Policy option (the majority of our students) is primarily asynchronous with little verbal interaction. One comment from our prior assessment response was that we should integrate more assessment throughout the program prior to the capstone and thesis. A way that we might address the presentation shortfall, the problem with oral communication, and integrate earlier assessment is by having an on-line research showcase. We can have a program requirement be that on-line and face to face graduate students participate in an on-line event where they share their research with each other, with faculty, and with anyone else interested

in attending. It would address our presentation shortfall and would allow us an earlier opportunity to assess oral communication deficiencies that might exist.

- Our score on written communication appears to have dropped as well. With fewer faculty, there may be a tendency to scan for content and overlook mechanics and overall development of ideas. We need to have discussions about assignment grading and providing more feedback on student writing.
- We have yet to implement an exit interview and an alumni survey for those recent graduates from our program to understand what issues and topics they are facing in the workforce that are not being addressed in our current curriculum.
- Develop partnerships with other programs like Economics and Sustainability to create dual master's degrees. This is an area of interest that we have seen and it is worth further exploration. We recently had one of our students enroll in a second master's program at the university.