

**Academic Assessment Report  
(Ph.D. / AFLS- Plant Pathology)  
University of Arkansas  
Academic Year 2023-2024**

**Contact**

Austin Jones, Instructor  
Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology  
PTSC 217 | 479-575-2445 | [akj003@uark.edu](mailto:akj003@uark.edu)

**ENPL Mission**

The mission of the AFLSPH-Plant Pathology program within the department is to educate students and the public about plant diseases and to conduct basic and problem-solving research that results in new knowledge to minimize crop losses, ensure sustainable agricultural productivity and enhance the stewardship of our natural resources and environment.

**Program Goals**

1. Graduates have the discipline-specific knowledge in plant pathology required to perform successfully in appropriate-level private, government, or academic positions.
2. Graduates are able to design original research and interpret research results through statistical inference appropriate for post-graduate continuation of education or professional endeavors.
3. Graduates are able to prepare and synthesize information to effectively communicate, both orally and in writing, with technical or scientific and non-technical audiences.
4. Graduates have expertise in research and analytical skills through completion of a thesis research project.
5. Graduates demonstrate leadership and teamwork through service to the department, outreach to the public or service in professional societies.

**Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate situations or scenarios to arrive at well thought out and supported decisions and outcomes.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to work through and solve complex, multidisciplinary problems.
3. Students will demonstrate the appropriate depth and breadth of discipline specific knowledge required to function as expert entomology professionals.
4. Communication Skills
  - a. Students will demonstrate the skills required to effectively communicate technical/scientific information in oral platforms to general and professional audiences.
  - b. Students will demonstrate the ability to integrate, organize, and effectively present written reports of technical/scientific information to general and professional audiences.

5. Students will contribute to the advancement of science by acquiring skills (e.g. conceptual, statistics, laboratory or field skills, etc.) to fulfill project requirements to generate original and independent research data.
6. Students will demonstrate leadership and teamwork abilities via presentations and outreach activities presented in professional and public venues.

**Student Learning Outcome 6:** Students will demonstrate leadership and teamwork abilities via presentations and outreach activities presented in professional and public venues.

**A. Assessment Measure 1.**

- Achievement will be measured via number and level of student participation in scientific and public presentations.
- Students are expected to organize and conduct scientific presentations and outreach activities.
- A set of three rubrics adapted from designs from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) are the assigned measurement tools for these activities (see Addendum.) For leadership and organization of scientific communications, the outcomes are assessed by students' graduate advisor and advisory committees and based on content, quality, and clarity of delivery and communication.

**B. Acceptable and Ideal Targets (not required for indirect measures).**

- Acceptable: At the relevant events as listed above, 70% of students will have an average of greater than or equal to 3.0 on the attached rubrics.
- Ideal: At the relevant events as listed above, 90% of students will have an average of greater than or equal to 3.0 on the attached rubrics.

**C. Summary of Findings.**

- In the 2023-2024 academic year, one AFLSPH-Plant Pathology degree was granted.
- Of the three remaining PLPA Ph.D. students one transferred away with a departing faculty member and of the two remaining, neither participated in departmental seminar courses. However, one had completed this requirement prior to this academic year.
- Two PLPA Ph.D. students participated in departmental outreach as well as public oral presentations.

**D. Recommendations (not required for indirect measures)**

- The use of the graduate assessment rubric has to be fully implemented in the process of completing dissertation defenses so that completing the rubric is a routine practice for advisory committee members.

- Students should be made aware of the content of the rubrics upon their orientation as they enter the program.

## Overall Recommendations

The assessment results suggest we are preparing students well. However, there is room for improvement and changes are planned to further enhance the degree programs offered to students to best prepare them for careers.

Furthermore, the Ph.D. program has been updated to more clearly identify required coursework for the degree, and clarify seminar credit requirements. The update and distribution of the Graduate Student Handbook for ENPL students has been instrumental in clarifying communication on student expectations.

## Action Plan

- The student learning outcomes in this area, i.e. leadership and teamwork of public communications, have greatly shaped our discussions of changes to curricula and program policies. We continue to integrate activities and opportunities for graduate students from the ENTO and PLPA programs into joint activities (seminar, outreach efforts, new courses, social events), which improve and expand the experiences of each group.
- More Plant Pathology outreach activities should be planned to help meet the needs of these students to gain experience speaking publicly about their field of study.
- Our faculty curriculum committee recently proposed specific changes to program course requirements for all programs. We will make a concerted effort in the coming year to optimize available courses and adapt requirement to best fit the needs of our students.
- The graduate seminar courses in our programs are continuing to be adapted to have two offerings focused on 1) presentation and communication skills, and 2) reading and interpretation of scientific literature.

## Supporting Attachments

Rubric 1: Oral Communication VALUE  
Adapted from AACU rubric for oral communication

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a one to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.*

	<b>Capstone</b> 4	<b>Milestones</b> 3	<b>Benchmark</b> 2
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<b>Organization Scientific presentations should include all of the following sections: introduction with hypotheses and objectives, methods, results and conclusion.</b>	The presentation includes all the sections and the contents of each section are seamlessly integrated. Each section is clear and concise. The final conclusions are fully supported. Overall, the presentation is memorable.	The presentation includes all the sections and the contents of each section are consistently integrated. Most of the final conclusions are supported. The presentation is very informative.	The presentation includes all the sections and the integration of all the sections is apparent. Some sections are not thoroughly explained. Some conclusions are supported. The presentation is understandable.
<b>Language and use of technical vocabulary</b>	Uses appropriate and precise professional language and, language that is appropriate to the audience.	Mostly uses appropriate and precise professional language and, language that is appropriate to the audience.	Generally uses appropriate and precise professional language, but may not always be appropriate to audience.
<b>Delivery Clearly points to pertinent aspects</b>	Demonstrates confidence and knowledge. Engages the audience by skillfully keeping eye contact with the audience while making use of the supporting material and appropriate use of technology. Body language appropriately used to enhance value of presentation.	Appears comfortable with the topic and, consistently engages the audience. Makes appropriate use of the supporting material. Body language tentative.	Does not always appear comfortable with the topic or able to engage the audience. Uses supporting materials inconsistently... Limited eye contact with audience. Some distracting mannerisms.
<b>Supporting Material Presented and shows clear understanding</b>	Supporting materials are attractive, carefully designed and with clear purpose that elegantly supports the message. They do not repeat the oral content. Proper credit to references given.	Supporting materials are well designed and properly used to convey message. Proper credit to references given.	Supporting materials are adequately prepared and help conveying the message. Proper credit to references given in most cases.
<b>Central Message effort</b>	Central message is strongly supported by all the sections of the presentation. The audience fully understands the relevance and implications of the research.	Central message is clear. The audience understand the basic aspects of the research.	Central message is clear. The audience can deduce the importance of the research.

Rubric 2: Written Communication Value

Adapted from the written communication rubric from AACU

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a 1 to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.*

	<b>Capstone 4</b>	<b>Milestones 3</b>	<b>Benchmark 2</b>
<b>Purpose for Writing</b>	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of audience, intent of writing is clear and focuses all elements of the work.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of audience, intent of writing is clear and focuses most elements of the work.	Demonstrates awareness of audience, intent of writing can be inferred by the audience and focuses some elements of the work.
<b>Content</b>	Contains the necessary amount of information carefully	Contains the necessary information conveying a	Contains relevant information but not well- focused to accurately

	summarized to convey a clear and informative message to the audience	general message to the audience.	convey the message to the audience.
<b>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</b>	Understands scientific conventions of writing and, skillfully uses appropriate scientific terms. Demonstrates excellent understanding of technical language.	Understands scientific conventions of writing and consistently uses relevant scientific language.	Uses some scientific conventions and is aware of relevant scientific language.
<b>Sources:</b> include published literature	Comprehensively uses published references that are critically analyzed and presented in the appropriate context. Background information is clear and carefully summarized given proper credit to authors in publications. Meticulously uses own words and style avoiding any possible plagiarism.	Comprehensively uses publishes references that are assumed to be of high quality. Background information is well summarized given proper credit to authors in publications. Uses own words frequently.	Uses most references that provide relevant information. Avoids plagiarism.
<b>Results:</b> includes data from research and in the form of figures, tables, images.	Logically presents high quality data that is comprehensive, informative, cohesive and skillfully integrated. Appropriate data is properly analyzed and adheres to scientific standards.	Presents high quality data that is well integrated. Data is well presented and properly analyzed.	Presents sufficient data and properly analyzed. Presentation is adequate.
<b>Discussion</b>	Demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of the topic by carefully integrating published information with results from own research. Conveys a strong message that is fully supported by results.	Demonstrates broad knowledge and is capable of integrating published information with results from own research. Conveys a general message about research	Demonstrates relevant knowledge and relevance of the research is apparent. Integration of literature and own work adequate. General message lacks depth.

Rubric 3: Problem Solving and Critical Thinking  
 adapted from AACU rubrics on Problem Solving, Inquiry and Analysis and Creative Thinking

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a 1 to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.*

	<b>Capstone 4</b>	<b>Milestones 3</b>	<b>Benchmark 2</b>
<b>Define Problem Reflects an understanding of the context in terms of current knowledge</b>	Demonstrates the ability to construct a clear and insightful problem statement with evidence of all relevant literature and observations.	Demonstrates the ability to construct a clear problem statement with evidence of most relevant literature and observations.	Demonstrate adequate ability to construct a problem statement with evidence of most relevant literature and observations, but problem statement is superficial.
<b>Hypotheses</b>	Proposes one or more hypotheses that indicates a deep comprehension of the problem. Hypotheses address all of the relevant relevant literature and observations, and relations between hypotheses are strong.	Proposes one or more hypotheses that indicates comprehension of the problem. Hypotheses address most of the relevant relevant literature and observations, but relations between hypotheses are weak	Proposes one hypothesis that is superficial rather than designed to address the relevant literature and observations of the problem.
<b>Experimental Approach</b>	Clear objectives are proposed for each hypothesis. Appropriate methodology are adopted from across disciplines. All necessary treatments and controls are included. Analysis is appropriate and well thought out. All experiments are feasible in terms of time, effort, facilities and cost. Schedule of experiments well developed. Likely problems with experiments anticipated and contingencies outlined.	Objectives proposed for each hypothesis mostly clear. Methodology is appropriately developed, however, more subtle aspects are ignored. Most necessary treatments and controls are included. Analysis is appropriate, but needs more detail. Most experiments are feasible in terms of time, effort, facilities and cost. Schedule of experiments mostly developed. Some problems with experiments anticipated.	Objectives proposed for hypothesis mostly clear. Elements of the methodology are poorly developed, or unfocused. Most necessary treatments and controls are included. Analysis vague. Problems with experiments not anticipated.
<b>Interpretation of Results, Limitations, and Implications</b>	Clear understanding of how results relate to the hypothesis, the other hypotheses and to the stated problem. Insightfully discusses in detail relevant and supported limitations and implications of the research. Demonstrates a clear understanding of future research direction.	Has an understanding of how results relate to individual hypothesis and to the stated problem, but not necessarily to the other hypotheses. Discusses relevant and supported limitations and implications of the research. Demonstrates some understanding of future research direction.	Has a superficial understanding of how results relate to individual hypotheses and to the stated problem. Presents relevant and supported limitations and implications. Can suggest possible future research direction.