

Program Assessment Report and Plan
HESC Master's Program
University of Arkansas
2022-2023

1. Department Name & Contact Information

School of Human Environmental Sciences

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2. Department Mission

The School will inspire people and organizations to reach their full potential through the delivery of innovative research, education, and service focused on individuals, families, communities, and their environments.

3. Program Goals

- **Goal 1:** Students can evaluate the depth and limitations of the current knowledge in human environmental sciences and its related disciplines;
- **Goal 2:** Students develop an attitude of inquiry and independent thinking by promoting analytic study, integration, and application of information and concepts derived from research in the various areas of human environmental sciences;
- **Goal 3:** Students understand the need for research in human environmental sciences and related disciplines and the role of research in the continual growth of knowledge and in the viability of academic disciplines; and
- **Goal 4:** Students learn to communicate accurately and effectively.

4. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

- **SLO 1:** Students will master evidence-based knowledge appropriate to their area of concentration. *(assessed in odd academic years)*
- **SLO 2:** Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and address complex problems in their area of concentration by forming solutions that are contextually appropriate, feasible, and relevant to public policy. *(assessed in even academic years)*
- **SLO 3:** Students will be able to critically analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, ideas, and beliefs in the process of forming conclusions and solutions to complex issues and problems appropriate to their area of concentration. *(assessed in even academic years)*
- **SLO 4:** Students will demonstrate proficient communication skills *(assessed in odd academic years)*
 - be able to demonstrate appropriate interpersonal and oral communication skills to a variety of audiences.
 - be able to demonstrate appropriate written communications.
- **SLO 5:** Thesis students will demonstrate the ability to design, implement and analyze research appropriate to their area of concentration; non-thesis master students will demonstrate an understanding of research methods and design appropriate to their area of concentration. *(assessed every academic year)*

5. Assessment Reports for Student Learning Outcomes 2, 3, and 5

- A. Student Learning Outcome 2.** Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and address complex problems in their area of concentration by forming solutions that are contextually appropriate, feasible, and relevant to public policy.

Assessment Measure

1. **Direct measures:**
 - i. Thesis Track: Assessment of written and oral thesis defense
 - ii. Non-Thesis Track: Assessment of written and oral comprehensive exam
2. **Key personnel:** Graduate studies committee members; academic and/or thesis committee graduate faculty members for each student

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

Rubric Categories (Written):

- Originality and potential for contribution to public policy (item 4 on written assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 1 = does not meet expectation; 2 = meets expectation; 3 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 3 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

Rubric Categories (Oral):

- Originality and potential for contribution to public policy (item 4 on oral assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 0 - 5 where 0 = does not meet expectation, 2.5 = meets expectation, and 5 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 5 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

Findings

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Spring 2023 met or exceeded expectations on the written assessment rubric (≥ 2) and the oral assessment rubric (≥ 2.5) (n=2).
2. Non-Thesis Track: Nothing to report

- B. Student Learning Outcome 3.** Students will be able to critically analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, ideas, and beliefs in the process of forming conclusions and solutions to complex issues and problems appropriate to their area of concentration.

Assessment Measure

1. **Direct measures:**
 - i. For thesis students, assessment of written and oral thesis defense
 - ii. For non-thesis students, assessment of written and oral comprehensive exam
2. **Key personnel:** Graduate studies committee members; academic and/or thesis committee graduate faculty members for each student

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

Rubric Categories (Written):

- Originality and potential for contribution to discipline (item 4 on written assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 1 = does not meet expectation; 2 = meets expectation; 3 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the written rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 3 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

Rubric Categories (Oral):

- Mastery of the subject (item 4 on oral assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 0 - 5 where 0 = does not meet expectation, 2.5 = meets expectation, and 5 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the oral rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 5 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

Findings

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Spring 2023 met or exceeded expectations on the written assessment rubric (≥ 2) and the oral assessment rubric (≥ 2.5) (n=2).
2. Non-Thesis Track: Nothing to report

- C. Student Learning Outcome 5.** Thesis students will demonstrate the ability to design, implement and analyze research appropriate to their area of concentration; non-thesis master students will demonstrate an understanding of research methods and design appropriate to their area of concentration.

Assessment Measure

1. Direct measures:

- i. For thesis students, assessment of written and oral thesis defense
- ii. For non-thesis students, assessment of written and oral comprehensive exam

2. Key personnel: Graduate studies committee members; academic and/or thesis committee graduate faculty members for each student

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

Rubric Categories (Written):

- Mastery of methods of inquiry (item 2 on written assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 1 = does not meet expectation; 2 = meets expectation; 3 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the written rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 3 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

Rubric Categories (Oral):

- Organization (item 3 on oral assessment rubric)
- Rating scale: 0 - 5 where 0 = does not meet expectation, 2.5 = meets expectation, and 5 = exceeds expectation

It is **acceptable** that 75% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the oral rubric; it is **ideal** that 95% of all students perform at a satisfactory (≥ 2.5) or higher level in the subject area portion of the rubric. The highest achievable score is 5 in the mastery of the assessment criterion.

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Spring 2023 met or exceeded expectations on the written assessment rubric (≥ 2) and the oral assessment rubric (≥ 2.5) (n=2).
2. Non-Thesis Track: Nothing to report

6. Summary of Findings

- Two graduate students on the thesis track achieved learning outcomes 2, 3, and 5. The two thesis track students showed their comprehensive understanding of theoretical approaches and various research methods in their theses. The students' theses demonstrated their knowledge on specific issues and potential solutions in the field of study.
- While students appear to be successfully advancing through the program, there seems to be some misalignment and overlap in program goals, student learning outcomes, and assessment measures, which is likely due to multiple transitions in program coordination and leadership over the past 6 years.

7. Recommendations (not required for indirect measures)

- It is required that graduate students on the thesis-track present research posters at the annual graduate student research symposium in the spring semester. This supports their success in project planning and oral communication leading up to the assessment measures.
- It is recommended that students attend a professional conference in their discipline during the degree program, ideally as a presenter.
- It is suggested that students complete their thesis proposals in the beginning of the third semester and defend their theses in the fourth semester to complete degree requirements in a timely manner. Approval of the research proposal, or at the very least, a pre-proposal should occur before data collection begins for original research or before data analysis commences when using existing data.
- It is also recommended that better student tracking and communication mechanisms be established so that graduate students are better able to progress through the program and student learning outcomes can be more easily monitored over time.
- It is recommended that the Graduate Admission Committee review and revise the program and student learning assessment metrics so they are more comprehensive of the program, yet also mutually exclusive for assessment measurement.

8. Action Plan

- At the beginning of the Fall 23 academic year, the Graduate Admissions Committee will create a subcommittee for assessment review and revision with the goal of clarifying program goals and student learning outcomes, and then mapping assessment directly or indirectly on to these goals and outcomes.