

**Program Assessment Report and Plan
HESC Master's Program
University of Arkansas
2024-2025**

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 2023-2024*)
- **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 2022-2023*)
- **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 2022-2023*)
- **SLO 4:** Students will demonstrate proficient communication skills. (*assessed in 2023-2024*)
 - be able to demonstrate appropriate interpersonal and oral communication skills to a variety of audiences.
- **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 annually*)

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

- A. 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:

- Quality of research questions, hypotheses, or other inquiry statements (item 4)
- Conclusions/solutions are contextually appropriate, feasible, relevant, and actionable (item 7)
- Originality and potential for contribution (item 14)
- *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.

Findings: Target = Met

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=3).
2. Non-Thesis Track: 75% of students completing comprehensive exams during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=4).

- 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:

- Master of field theories and concepts (item 3)
- Appropriate use of critical perspective and analysis (item 6)
- Level of detail (item 9)
- *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.

Findings: Target = Met

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=3).
2. Non-Thesis Track: 75% of students completing comprehensive exams during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=4).

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 thesis defense
 - ii. For non-thesis students, assessment of written comprehensive exam
2. **Key personnel:** Academic and/or thesis committee graduate faculty members for each student

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

Rubric Categories:

- Mastery of research design/methods (item 5)
- Completed within appropriate time frame (item 16)
- *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.

Findings: Target = Met

1. Thesis Track: 100% of students defending their thesis projects during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=3).
2. Non-Thesis Track: 100% of students completing comprehensive exams during Fall 2024/Spring 2025 met or exceeded expectations (≥ 2) on oral and written assessments (n=4).

6. Summary of Findings

- Three graduate students on the thesis track and three on the non-thesis-track successfully achieved learning outcomes 2, 3, and 5. Students demonstrated their comprehensive understanding of appropriate, feasible and relevant research that can be critically analyzed and synthesized to inform conclusions/solutions. One non-thesis student met expectations on the comprehensive exam rubric, but scores fell just below acceptable for SLO assessment. Faculty stated the student was open to constructive feedback and made improvements.

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. This activity with full participation should be continued.
- 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 by 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.

8. Action Plan

- The HESC-MS assessment schedule and measurement tool were both updated and implemented beginning in Fall 2024. However, obtaining the rubrics from faculty in a timely manner had inconsistent results. The graduate coordinator will work with the director and office staff to develop better communication and/or submission processes for assessment rubrics following thesis defenses/comprehensive exams.

Rubric:

[Master's Assessment Rubric](#)