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University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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Detailed Assessment Report
2015-2016 English PhD
As of: 11/10/2016 03:40 PM CENTRAL
(Includes those Action Plans with Budget Amounts marked *One-Time, Recurring, No Request*.)

Mission / Purpose

All students in the English Ph.D. degree program receive a broad education in the discipline that prepares them to teach effectively at any college level and provides the background for advanced research in their areas of particular expertise.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

SLO 1: Breadth and Depth
Students will demonstrate a breadth of knowledge across the discipline and a depth of knowledge in their area of specialization.

Related Measures

M 1: Comprehensive Exams

Each student will complete a series of four comprehensive written and one oral examinations in which candidates respond to questions designed to evaluate the breadth and depth of their knowledge. Two faculty members will evaluate the written exams in each area and rate them pass with distinction, pass, or fail. If the two evaluators disagree on an exam, a third faculty member will evaluate it. If necessary, the Assessment Officer can discover how many exams reached the third evaluator, and thus monitor how reliable the evaluations are. The oral exam is evaluated by a different committee of three faculty. Students may attempt any exam only two times, and are ineligible to complete the program unless all exams are passed.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

Target:
We expect 80% of individual exams to evaluate as pass or high pass. In addition, we expect 80% of people who attempt to complete exams will complete them successfully.

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Met

2015/2016: This year, 14 students took 38 comprehensive exam components. 33 of the exam components were graded as pass or pass with distinction, for a pass rate of 84.2%. This passing rate meets our goal of 80% and represents an increase over the previous year's rate of 80.3%.
Our rate of exam retakes meeting the requirements has also risen: a total of 6 exams were taken as a second or third attempt, and 5 of the 6 exams were graded as passes (83.3%). Our department allows two attempts at an exam

as a matter of course, but students may appeal to take an exam a third time. In the last two years we have become more stringent about enforcing the 2-attempt rule unless the student can demonstrate extenuating circumstances or other significant progress. This year, only one student wrote one exam for a third time and passed it.

11 students attempted to complete their exams in this cycle, and 9 were successful, for a completion rate of 81.8%. This meets our target of 80%. Moreover, both of the students who did not complete their exams had extenuating circumstances (health reasons).

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

Examine passing rate on written exams

Our target of 80% passing comprehensive exams has never really been completely met. The exam passing rate is holding very steady at 75%, with only small variance each semester. This is true of the exams since data was continually kept starting in 2007. The faculty will discuss this issue, with an eye to the question of whether we should lower our expectations to match the performance, or whether we need to find additional ways to improve student performance. The assessment instrument is a form of writing (timed writing assignments) that our students rarely exercise, and in fact is one that has become less frequent across the university environment. Perhaps this is not the best way to assess our students' knowledge? There is some idea that the exams present a rigorous challenge for students, and as such are crucial to their development as scholars, and their utility as an assessment is secondary (or irrelevant).

Established in Cycle: 2012-2013
Implementation Status: Finished
Priority: Medium

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
> **Measure:** Comprehensive Exams | **Outcome/Objective:** Breadth and Depth

Implementation Description: As of fall 2016, we have been meeting or exceeding our target of 80% in the last few cycles, and we have implemented changes to exam formats in an attempt to better assess students' knowledge of their major field.
Projected Completion Date: 04/2016
Responsible Person/Group: Assessment Coordinator

Develop Grading Rubric

The former GC had requested faculty to require timed in-class writing assignments with the purpose of developing skills students need for taking exams. The current GC will remind faculty of this request and its purpose.
However, it would be useful to develop a grading rubric for PhD comprehensive exams that will identify the problem or problems for students failing exams. For example, if the rubric suggests that students are failing exams because of poor exam taking skills such as bad time management, then workshops that help students develop these skills can be organized. However, if the grading rubric suggests that students are lacking the breadth and depth of knowledge required to pass the exams, then a different strategy to improve exam passing rates will need

to be deployed.

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014
Implementation Status: Planned
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
Measure: Comprehensive Exams | **Outcome/Objective:**
Breadth and Depth

Implementation Description: Discuss the above Action Plan at Graduate Faculty Committee meeting at beginning of fall semester, and preview a suggested grading rubric. Develop rubric in time to be deployed for fall exams. At the end of the 2014/2015 academic year, review grading rubric and identify the problem in order to develop a new Action Plan for the following year.
Projected Completion Date: 05/2015
Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

Possible new PhD exam format

We have implemented new PhD exam formats for major exams to allow more flexibility in tailoring assessment to the needs of subfields. Fall 2016 is the first semester of the new exam formats.

Established in Cycle: 2014-2015
Implementation Status: Finished
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
Measure: Comprehensive Exams | **Outcome/Objective:**
Breadth and Depth

Implementation Description: We will track if these changes improve our completion rates.

Professional development tracking

To encourage broad participation in academia, it would be useful to track students' participation in various elements of the profession, such as attending and presenting at conferences, and publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Some measure of this activity may go on the term progress report.

Established in Cycle: 2015-2016
Implementation Status: Planned
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
Measure: Comprehensive Exams | **Outcome/Objective:**
Breadth and Depth

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

SLO 2: Research Design

Students will demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to design a research project that has the potential to contribute significant new knowledge related to the area of the student's specialization.

Related Measures

M 2: Prospectus

Each student will complete a prospectus for dissertation research in the student's chosen area of specialization. A committee of three faculty members will evaluate the prospectus and, after meeting with the candidate, vote to determine if the student has passed or failed this assessment.

However, the new Graduate Coordinator is somewhat skeptical of this measure, since the process of writing a prospectus isn't finished until the prospectus has been approved. Consequently, 100% of students should eventually have their dissertation prospectus approved. More relevant would be to devise a rubric that measures the level of research design achieved, rather than simply measuring pass rate.

As of 2015-2016, we are ending this measure of assessment because it has not proved useful.

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

Target:
We expect that 80% of prospectuses will be judged as passing.
This target seems unhelpful since one would expect that all dissertation prospectuses would eventually be judged as passing -- a student would not move on to the writing process if this were not the case. Consequently a new target needs to be established for prospectuses -- and this should possibly be a rubric. Grad Coordinator will discuss with Graduate Faculty Committee in order to devise more meaningful target. (8/2/2015)
As of 2015-2016, we are discontinuing this measure of assessment because prospectuses are only reported to the department and the graduate school once they have been approved. At this point the Graduate Committee does not want a more involved rubric.

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Met
2015-2016: All prospectuses that were submitted to the department were approved. However, as noted in the revised target, prospectuses are not submitted to the department until they are approved by the student's committee. The passage rate should thus always be 100%. We are discontinuing this measure.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

Continue to monitor student performance
Considering that dissertations have met the stated expectations, we should consider what it might mean for the program if we were to raise expectations on the dissertation sub-measures. Will dissertations improve over their current quality? Are current expectations created by past performance or are they ideal targets? Would students need more time, and thus more resources, to write better dissertations? Student performance should continue to be monitored, and if expectations continue to be met, it will be hard to argue against raising standards. This needs to be discussed by faculty.

Established in Cycle: 2012-2013
Implementation Status: Planned
Priority: Medium

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
Measure: Dissertation Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Communication

Measure: Prospectus | **Outcome/Objective:** Research
Design

Implementation Description: Graduate Faculty will discuss
assessment results with an eye toward raising standards.
Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

Develop Prospectus Rubric
Devise a rubric that measures the level of research design achieved,
rather than simply measuring pass rate.   [Preview Formatting]

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014
Implementation Status: Planned
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
Measure: Prospectus | **Outcome/Objective:** Research
Design

Implementation Description: Present draft of new rubric to graduate
faculty at the next Graduate Faculty Committee meeting early in the fall
semester. Make necessary revisions by second Grad Fac Comm
meeting in order to get approval by end of fall semester.
Projected Completion Date: 11/2014
Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

SLO 3: Research Communication
Students will demonstrate the ability to execute a research project and communicate its
results in oral and written formats associated with presentation and publication of original
research in the area of the student's specialization.

Connected Document
PhD Oral Defense Rubric

Related Measures

M 3: Dissertation Defense

Each student will complete a written dissertation. A committee of at least
three faculty members will evaluate the dissertation and, in a public
meeting, ask candidates questions to evaluate their understanding of the
nature of the research. The committee will vote to determine if the
student has passed or failed this assessment. At the time of the oral
exam, committee members will complete a rubric that covers both the
written and oral activities.

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

Target:
We expect 80% of people who submit a dissertation to have it judged as passing.
In addition, we have set goals for achievement levels as evaluated by a rubric
completed by 3 dissertation committee members at the defense. We hope to
achieve ratings of "meets" (2) or "exceeds" (3) expectations on at least 80% of
ratings for every rubric element, and we hope to achieve ratings of "exceeds
expectations" on at least 60% of ratings in 3 of the 6 elements.

Connected Document
PhD Oral Defense Rubric

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Met
In 2015-2016, we had 11 students defend their dissertations. All 11 were judged as passing (100%). We would hope that advisors would not let their students reach the defense if a dissertation was not ready, so our goal of 80% should and will be reevaluated.

Overall, students achieved grades of 2 or better in 160/161 (99.38%) of measurements. Students achieved the highest grade of 3 on 96/161 (59.63%) of all elements. On the top 3 of 6 elements (overall), students achieved the highest grade of 3 on 51/81 elements (63.0%). These findings meet our goals.

26 out of a total of 33 faculty members on dissertation committees submitted rubrics. This represents a faculty buy-in rate of 78.8%.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

Continue to monitor student performance
Considering that dissertations have met the stated expectations, we should consider what it might mean for the program if we were to raise expectations on the dissertation sub-measures. Will dissertations improve over their current quality? Are current expectations created by past performance or are they ideal targets? Would students need more time, and thus more resources, to write better dissertations? Student performance should continue to be monitored, and if expectations continue to be met, it will be hard to argue against raising standards. This needs to be discussed by faculty.

Established in Cycle: 2012-2013
Implementation Status: Planned
Priority: Medium

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
  Measure: Dissertation Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Communication
  Measure: Prospectus | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Design

Implementation Description: Graduate Faculty will discuss assessment results with an eye toward raising standards.
Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

Review Expectations
While it is satisfying to see that 100% of students met or exceeded expectations according to the assessment of their dissertations committee members in scoring the rubric, such an outcome does raise some question of whether expectations should be reviewed.
We have reviewed our expectations for the prospectuses, and determined that the goal of 80% is too low, in that all students must complete a prospectus.
The dissertation rubric expectations still need review. The Graduate Coordinator will bring up this question to the Graduate Faculty Committee to find out whether they feel that expectations should be raised, or if too much leniency is being seen in filling out the assessment rubric.

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014
Implementation Status: In-Progress
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
> **Measure:** Dissertation Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Communication

Projected Completion Date: 03/2017

Increase rate of submission of assessment rubrics

For this cycle, we had a 72% rate of submission of assessment dissertation defense rubrics, one of our main assessment tools. While faculty were given the rubric sheet at the time of the defense, and then the Grad Coordinator followed up via email, still this rate was low. Increase awareness of rubric elements among dissertations directors and dissertators during the writing process.

Established in Cycle: 2014-2015
Implementation Status: In-Progress
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
> **Measure:** Dissertation Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Communication

Implementation Description: In 2015-2016, the submission rate increased to 78%, but 100% of dissertation committees submitted at least one rubric. More work is needed, particularly in clarifying that each faculty member is expected to complete an individual rubric.
Responsible Person/Group: Graduate Coordinator

Term progress reports

When our students reach the dissertation phase, some of them fall out of contact with their dissertation directors for months at a time. To keep the lines of communication open, and to make sure that committees are up-to-date on a student's progress, the graduate coordinators are proposing departmental progress reports for all PhD students each semester. These format of these proposed progress reports will be discussed by the Graduate Committee in October 2016.

Established in Cycle: 2015-2016
Implementation Status: In-Progress
Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):
> **Measure:** Dissertation Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Communication

Projected Completion Date: 04/2017

Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

How were assessment results shared and evaluated within the unit?

Assessment results were first discussed by the graduate coordinators, who then drafted new action plans. The graduate coordinators then presented the findings and suggested courses of action to the department in a meeting of the English Graduate Committee.

Identify which action plans [created in prior cycle(s)] were implemented in this current cycle. For each of these implemented plans, were there any measurable or perceivable effects? How, if at all, did the findings appear to be affected by the implemented action plan?

In spring 2015, we implemented new protocols and formats for PhD major exams in order

to allow each concentration/area to better tailor their evaluation of students to the needs of their particular field. Fall 2016 is the first semester in which these new exams are being administered. We will continue to monitor this area to determine if the new formats are effective.

We have also been reaching out to faculty about the dissertation defense rubrics. The rate of individual faculty completion is improving somewhat: it was 78% this year compared to 72% last year. However, we have seen significant improvement in that 100% of dissertation committees submitted at least one rubric. It seems that some committees may complete the rubric as a group, whereas the intention is for individual assessment, so there is still some education to be done about the purpose of the rubric.

What has the unit learned from the current assessment cycle? What is working well, and what is working less well in achieving desired outcomes?

The department has learned that our efforts to prepare students for their comprehensive exams and to reduce the number of attempts before completion are working well. We have also learned that our tracking of successful prospectus completion has had little benefit for either the students or for the design of our program. Finally, we have learned that the previously low rates of faculty buy-in for completing dissertation defense rubrics were in part a result of some faculty not understanding the expectations of them; the faculty now understand better the purpose of the rubric and our rates of filling out the defense rubric are improving.