Annual Executive Summary Report

MS Executive Summary 2019-20

Program (CAS) - GEOG - Geography (MS) - 110

Program Mission Statement: The M.S. program in Geography specialize in three broad areas including nature-society dynamics, cultural-historical geography, and geographic information science including unmanned aerial systems (UAS). This degree program is designed for students to master the theoretical knowledge and skills to design, implement, and present original geographic research in oral and written form. Therefore, master's students study geographic research methods and analysis, the history and philosophies of geography, and knowledge of current geographic research.

2019 - 2020

Program Assessment Coordinator: Jon Comer

Plan Review and Approval

Date Current Plan Was Reviewed and Approved: 08/14/2018

Date of Future Plan Review and Approval: 08/14/2023

Summary of Assessment Findings

Describe overall assessment findings and faculty members' interpretation of the assessment results: Overall, results indicate that student performance is fairly consistent and that while we would always strive to see students achieving higher scores and performance, the average scores (and performance of most students) are at an acceptable level for most learning outcomes. Ultimately, a graduate student's curriculum follows a very specialized path beyond the few core courses, and they undertake a lot of independent work, so effecting curricular changes that can target weak areas (like writing or oral presentations) is especially challenging at the graduate level. Overall, faculty seem satisfied with the general results but will continue to focus on teaching writing skills through examples and extensive feedback on written work.

Dissemination of Findings

Describe the individual(s) or committee responsible for reviewing and interpreting assessment data: The Graduate Coordinator serves a dual role as Graduate Outcomes Assessment Coordinator and disseminates and gathers the rubrics from defenses and for the core courses (Rubrics A-D), and sends out repeated calls for artifact submission for Learning Outcome 1. He then collects, inputs, and preliminarily evaluates the data and computes summary statistics.

Describe the process for sharing and discussing assessment findings with program faculty: The Assessment Coordinator writes and circulates (via e-mail) a draft report for review and comment by all faculty in the department. This is done in early August in advance of an all-day planning conference held by the department the week before the fall semester begins, and discussion about the results, what they mean, and what to do with them subsequently occurs and is incorporated into a final draft of this report. This final draft is sent around a second time for final review before submission.

Program Improvements Based on Assessment

Based on data collected this year, what changes are being considered or planned for the program?: At this point in time, no concrete ideas for making any changes to the program have emerged.

Based on this year's findings, what (if any) changes are planned for the assessment process?: No changes are planned for 2020-21 at this time.

Describe the process for implementing these changes/planned program improvements: Not applicable.

Program Improvements Made in the Last Year: Course Improvements

Goals for the Coming Year: Get more colleagues involved in both assessment generally and in developing ideas to improve student performance.

Is this Summary Report Complete?: Yes

List all individuals associated with this report preparation: Jon Comer

Assessment Impact Report: Plans and Findings

MS Report 2019-20

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Outcome: Effective Communications

MS students will develop the ability to communicate geographic information effectively orally and in writing.

Outcome Status: Active
Planned Assessment Year: 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020
Outcome Type: Skills

Assessment Methods

Analysis of Written Artifacts - All students undergoing a defense of some sort are assessed on their writing and oral presentation skills by all committee members (typically three faculty members on an MS committee). Rubrics are distributed to the committee members before the defense and are usually collected afterwards, although some faculty members return them later.

As to the other component of assessment, all instructors of graduate-level courses are requested to provide all Geography student papers from one of their assignments, usually a term paper or project, for evaluation by paid summer artifact readers. These readers have both assessed artifacts in the past, and were given general instructions on the assessment of the artifacts. Instructors were not aware of any identifying student information, including level (MS or PhD), to avoid bias, although the readers were also contributors of some artifacts so likely recognized their courses and their students via their writing. (Active)

* Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark: Students will average 3.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale).
Timeline for Assessment: Each Semester
Related Documents:
E written communication skills rubric final.pdf

Findings

Reporting Period: 2019 - 2020   08/04/2020
Conclusion: 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)
Solid results on communications skills
Number of Students Assessed: 7
Number of Successful Students: 7
How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?: All students undergoing a proposal defense of some sort are assessed on their writing skills (rubric E) by all committee members, which included 3 students this year. Also, all instructors of graduate-level courses are requested to provide all Geography MS student papers from one of their assignments, usually a term paper or project, for evaluation by paid summer artifact readers.

This provided 16 assessments, but for just 7 unique students as several students were enrolled in several classes that were

sampled. Via both processes, 7 of the 9 MS students in the program were assessed at least once this year.

What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?: The results of this assessment were more consistent than last year. For the 3 students who underwent a thesis proposal defense, scores were more than satisfactory and averaged 3.33 (out of 4) on Rubric E, with categories for Content (3.11), Organization (3.56), and Style/Mechanics (3.33). Overall, when committee members assess students' research proposals,
they perform quite well and all students received either 3 or 4 on the rubric on all three categories, with just a small
number of 2s and no 1s or zeros.

Additionally, the two faculty members who assessed 16 graduate seminar artifacts found writing quality to be
roughly the same, with scores on the Content (3.25), Organization (3.25), and S&M (3.22). Overall, the distribution of the
48 total scores (3 rubric categories for all 16 artifacts assessed) were 0 (0%), 1 (0%), 2 (17%), 3 (43%), and 4
(41%), somewhat higher than last year.

Related Documents:
E written communication skills rubric final.pdf

Use of Findings (Actions)

Use of Findings (Actions): These findings might indicate that our efforts to focus on writing quality are paying off, but it is just a single year, modest improvement so we continue to monitor this aspect and encourage faculty to make writing quality an explicit aspect of their instruction and grading, as most do. Overall, these results are quite satisfactory. (08/04/2020)

Oral Presentation - All students undergoing a defense of some sort are assessed on their oral presentation skills by all committee members (typically three on an MS committee). Rubrics are distributed to the committee members before the defense and are usually collected afterwards, although some faculty members return them later. (Active)

* Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark: Students will average 2.2 or better (on a 3.0 scale).
Timeline for Assessment: Every semester
Related Documents:
J oral communication skills rubric.pdf

Findings

Reporting Period: 2019 - 2020   08/04/2020
Conclusion: 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)
Modest improvement over last year
Number of Students Assessed: 4
Number of Successful Students: 4
How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?: All students undergoing a defense of some sort are assessed on their oral presentation skills by all committee members. This year 4 MS students underwent a defense of some time, with 2 of those 4 being assessed twice (proposal and final defense) for 6 total assessments.
What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?: Overall, students are performing well, with the average scores (out of 3) in Content (2.78), Organization (2.94), and Delivery (2.80) above the desired minimum average of 2.2, means that on the whole MS students perform fairly well in giving their presentations. No students received a 1 or 0 in any category, and the scores across the three categories are quite consistent which implies that there are no specific weak areas.
Related Documents:
J oral communication skills rubric.pdf

Use of Findings (Actions)

Use of Findings (Actions): Besides funding for conferences, the department typically holds practice sessions before major conferences, organized by the student organizations in the department, and these definitely need to continue. Getting more faculty to attend these sessions is a goal that will provide betterquality critiques that could help students improve their presentation skills. (08/04/2020)

Outcome: Geographic Knowledge

MS students will develop apposite knowledge in geographic literature and research.

Outcome Status: Active

Program (CAS) - GEOG - Geography (MS) - 110

Planned Assessment Year: 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020
Outcome Type: Knowledge

Assessment Methods

Course Embedded Assignments - Instructors of the respective courses assess their students on rubrics specific to the course, designed by them (5403 – Rubric B, 5413 – Rubric C; see departmental Graduate Assessment Plan). Instructors are provided with a copy of the rubric and instructions early in the semester, and are left to complete it at their leisure (either as the semester progresses or at the end) but are urged to separate student grades from achievements of specific benchmarks as indicated on the rubric. (Active)

* Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark: Students will average 3.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale).
Timeline for Assessment: Yearly
Related Documents:
B 5403 rubric.doc
C 5413 Rubric.doc

Findings

Reporting Period: 2019 - 2020   08/04/2020
Conclusion: 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)
Overall satisfactory results
Number of Students Assessed: 9

Number of Successful Students: 8

How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?: All students enrolled in the classes for this learning objective are assessed by the instructor. This year there were 4 MS students in GEOG 5403 and 5 in GEOG 5413; two students took both classes last year so there were 7 unique students but 9 combined assessments

What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?: In 5403, students tended to excel in writing literature reviews and research proposals in areas of their own research areas and other areas of interest. They had more limited motivation in discussion of research from a wide variety of subfields within geography, though there were exceptions. Two students in particular struggled to find interest in fields outside their interest. However, the same two students came from areas outside geography. Some students had difficulty finding a research project and structuring it. I attribute this to not having an advisor or not having chosen a topic in their first semester. All students except one were in their second or third semester in the program. Attendance and timely delivery of assignments were acceptable. Enthusiasm in the class was very good.

In 5413, there was a wide range in abilities but perhaps this was heightened because most of the students were not taking this class in their first semester, unlike the usual pattern. Student achievement on LOs #3 and #5 is highest and suggests that students did well in the areas of critical thought and analysis, which aligns with our program goals.
Related Documents:
B 5403 rubric.doc
C 5413 Rubric.doc

Use of Findings (Actions)

Use of Findings (Actions): In 5403, a wider range of readings will be selected. Preferably, students coming from non-geography majors should take History and Philosophy of Geography before taking this class. For the individual projects (theses and dissertation proposals) students must have already chosen an advisor, and have already a clear though not detailed idea of what they want to do for their research.

In 5413, students seem most engaged when the content relates to their specific interests. Some future assignments may be adjusted to add more flexibility for the students. (08/04/2020)

Outcome: Geographic Skills

MS students will develop skills in tools for geographic data collection and methods of analysis.

Outcome Status: Active
Planned Assessment Year: 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020

Program (CAS) - GEOG - Geography (MS) - 110

Outcome Type: Skills

Assessment Methods

Course Embedded Assignments - Instructors of the respective courses assess their students on rubrics specific to the course, designed by them (5303 – Rubric A, 6313 – Rubric D; see departmental Graduate Assessment Plan). Instructors are provided with a copy of the rubric and instructions early in the semester, and are left to complete it at their leisure (either as the semester progresses or at the end) but are urged to separate student grades from achievements of specific benchmarks as indicated on the rubric. (Active)

* Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark: Students will average 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale).
Timeline for Assessment: Yearly for GEOG 5303
Every other year for GEOG 6313
Related Documents:
A 5303 Rubric.doc
D 6313 Rubric.doc

Findings

Reporting Period: 2019 - 2020   08/04/2020
Conclusion: 2 - Meets Minimum Program Expectations (Developing)
Subpar performance but with limited data to assess
Number of Students Assessed: 3
Number of Successful Students: 2
How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?: All students enrolled in each class are assessed by the instructors. GEOG 6313 was not taught so there were no assessments this year.
What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?: The students were largely successful. There were only 3 MS students in GEOG 5303 this year so it is difficult to draw conclusions; one was an outstanding student, one solid, and one struggled, putting average scores on Rubric A averaging about 2.4 across all levels but with higher performance on outcome 3 (employ multivariate statistical methods, with a 3.33 average) and lower performance on outcome 4 (detect spatial patterns, with a 1.67 average due to incomplete work by one student on the assessed assignment).

GEOG 6313 was not offered.
Related Documents:
A 5303 Rubric.doc
D 6313 Rubric.doc

Use of Findings (Actions)

Use of Findings (Actions): Instructor of GEOG 5303 is happy with student performance and believes the current course structure and design is effectively serving departmental needs.

GEOG 6313 has not been taught for a few years. (08/04/2020)

Outcome: Geographic Research

MS students will develop geographic creative components or theses that marshal evidence, analyze data, and synthesize meaningful conclusions.

Outcome Status: Active
Planned Assessment Year: 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020
Outcome Type: Skills

Assessment Methods

Review of Thesis/Dissertation/Creative Component - All students undergoing a final defense are assessed on their research and writing skills by all committee members (typically three faculty members on an MS committee). Rubrics are distributed to the committee members at the beginning of the defense and are usually collected afterwards, although some faculty members return them later. (Active)

* Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark: Students will average 3.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale).
Timeline for Assessment: Each Semester
Related Documents:
F research skills CREATIVE COMPONENT rubric_final 2010.pdf
G masters research skills rubric_final 2010.pdf

Findings

Reporting Period: 2019 - 2020   08/04/2020
Conclusion: 4 - Exceeds Program Expectations (Advanced)
Strong performance this year
Number of Students Assessed: 3
Number of Successful Students: 3
How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?: All students who defended a thesis or creative component were assessed by their committee members. This year 3 students defended their theses and no creative components were defended.
What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?: Given the small sample size, these 3 students were all high performers and their rubric scores averaged from a low of 3.6 (out of 4) to a high of 3.9. Thus, all 3 students performed well across all categories on Rubric G.
Related Documents:
F research skills CREATIVE COMPONENT rubric_final 2010.pdf
G masters research skills rubric_final 2010.pdf

Use of Findings (Actions)
Use of Findings (Actions): Based on the strong performance of this year's graduating MS students, no systemic changes are evident. (08/04/2020)