

# Annual Executive Summary Report



PhD Executive Summary 2019-20

## Program (CAS) - GEOG - Geography (PhD) - 438

**Program Mission Statement:** The Ph.D. 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, doctoral 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. 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) 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.

Unfortunately, we had very few PhD students assessed this year due to (1) low enrollments in core courses (few new PhD students), just 1 dissertation defense, 2 comprehensive exams, and 0 dissertation proposals, so most learning outcomes had 0-2 students assessed.

#### 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 and 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 but our relatively low numbers of assessed doctoral students may have to force us to assess with different methods.

**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



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### Outcome: Effective Communications

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

**Outcome Status:** Active

**Planned Assessment Year:** 2016 - 2017, 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 skills by all committee members (typically four or five on a PhD committee). Rubrics are distributed to the committee members before the defense and are usually collected afterwards, although some faculty members return them later.

Also, 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.docx](#)

### Findings

**Reporting Period:** 2019 - 2020

08/04/2020

**Conclusion:** 2 - Meets Minimum Program Expectations (Developing)

Minimally adequate samples for analysis

**Number of Students Assessed:** 4

**Number of Successful Students:** 2

**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, but there were no dissertation proposals defended this year. Also, all instructors of graduate-level courses are requested to provide all Geography PhD student papers from one of their assignments, usually a term paper or project, for evaluation by paid summer artifact readers. This provided 4 assessments, 1 each for just 4 different students.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** Overall, there is little to assess here. No PhD students defended proposals this year and only 4 course artifacts were collected that were written by PhD students. Their scores averaged between 2.5 and 2.88 on Rubric E, which was lower than last year but we had twice as many artifacts (8) and 4

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defenses last year with which to construct a slightly better picture of student performance.

## Related Documents:

[E written communication skills rubric final.docx](#)

## *Use of Findings (Actions)*

**Use of Findings (Actions):** These findings will confirm our believe that students continue to struggle with effective writing, and that the department still needs to find ways to improve this area. Some instructors of graduate courses are more focused than others on writing, but all students must take GEOG 5403 (assessed in the Learning Outcome "Geographic Knowledge" in which the instructor both focuses on writing and developing a proposal). (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 four or five on a PhD 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).

## Related Documents:

[J oral communication skills rubric.docx](#)

## *Findings*

**Reporting Period:** 2019 - 2020

08/04/2020

**Conclusion:** 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)

Students give good oral presentations

**Number of Students Assessed:** 1

**Number of Successful Students:** 1

**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 1 PhD students underwent a dissertation defense and none defended proposals.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** Only 1 PhD student had a public defense, so a detailed assessment of performance this year is inappropriate and invalid.

## Related Documents:

[J oral communication skills rubric.docx](#)

## *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 better quality critiques that could help students improve their presentation skills. (08/04/2020)

## Outcome: Geographic Knowledge

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

**Outcome Status:** Active

**Planned Assessment Year:** 2016 - 2017, 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

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## Related Documents:

[B 5403 rubric.doc](#)

[C 5413 Rubric.doc](#)

## Findings

**Reporting Period:** 2019 - 2020

08/04/2020

**Conclusion:** 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)

Cannot assess -- insufficient data

**Number of Students Assessed:** 1

**Number of Successful Students:** 1

**How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?:** Instructors of the respective courses assess their students on rubrics specific to the course, designed by them. This year there were no PhD students in GEOG 5403 and just 1 student in GEOG 5413.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** Insufficient data -- only 1 PhD student took 5413 and none took 5403 this year.

## Related Documents:

[B 5403 rubric.doc](#)

[C 5413 Rubric.doc](#)

## Use of Findings (Actions)

**Use of Findings (Actions):** No new information exists with which to formulate any actions. (08/04/2020)

## Outcome: Geographic Skills

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

**Outcome Status:** Active

**Planned Assessment Year:** 2016 - 2017, 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020

**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 or better (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)

Cannot assess -- insufficient data.

**Number of Students Assessed:** 1

**Number of Successful Students:** 0

**How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?:** Instructors of the respective courses assess their students on rubrics specific to the course, designed by them. This year there was just 1 PhD student in GEOG 5303 and GEOG 6313 was not taught.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** No new information exists with which to formulate any actions.

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## Related Documents:

[A 5303 Rubric.doc](#)

[D 6313 Rubric.doc](#)

## *Use of Findings (Actions)*

**Use of Findings (Actions):** No new information exists with which to formulate any actions. (08/04/2020)

## Outcome: Geographic Research

PhD students will develop geographic dissertations that marshal evidence, analyze data, and synthesize meaningful conclusions.

**Outcome Status:** Active

**Planned Assessment Year:** 2016 - 2017, 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 four or five faculty members on a PhD 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:

[I PhD research skills rubric\\_final 2010.docx](#)

## *Findings*

**Reporting Period:** 2019 - 2020

08/04/2020

**Conclusion:** 4 - Exceeds Program Expectations (Advanced)

Cannot assess -- insufficient data

**Number of Students Assessed:** 1

**Number of Successful Students:** 1

**How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?:** All students undergoing a final dissertation defense are assessed on their research and writing skills by all committee members.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** With only a single assessment (defense) undertaken, no results are reportable.

## Related Documents:

[I PhD research skills rubric\\_final 2010.docx](#)

## *Use of Findings (Actions)*

**Use of Findings (Actions):** No new information exists with which to formulate any actions. (08/04/2020)

## Outcome: Specialty Areas

PhD students will be able to identify and discuss significant geographic trends within their (three) chosen specialty areas of geography.

**Outcome Status:** Active

**Planned Assessment Year:** 2016 - 2017, 2017 - 2018, 2018 - 2019, 2019 - 2020

**Start Date:** 05/12/2019

**Outcome Type:** Knowledge

## *Assessment Methods*

**Comprehensive, Certification, or Professional Exam(s)** - All doctoral students taking comprehensive exams are assessed with Rubric H (Active)

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\* **Learning Outcome Goal/Benchmark:** Students will average 3.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale)

**Timeline for Assessment:** Every semester

**Related Documents:**

[H phd specialty area knowledge rubric.docx](#)

## *Findings*

**Reporting Period:** 2019 - 2020

08/04/2020

**Conclusion:** 3 - Meets Program Expectations (Proficient)

Cannot assess -- insufficient data

**Number of Students Assessed:** 2

**Number of Successful Students:** 2

**How were students selected to participate in the assessment of this outcome?:** All doctoral students taking comprehensive exams are assessed.

**What do the findings suggest about student achievement of this learning outcome?:** With only two doctoral students taking comprehensive exams this year, no data are reportable and no conclusions can be drawn.

**Related Documents:**

[H phd specialty area knowledge rubric.docx](#)

## *Use of Findings (Actions)*

**Use of Findings (Actions):** No new information exists with which to formulate any actions. (08/04/2020)