

**ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR GRADUATE STUDIES
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS
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Introduction and Philosophy

The Graduate Council recognizes the complexity of assessment and the importance of designing measures that are multidimensional, meaningful, and oriented toward program improvement and enhanced student learning. Consequently, the three categories of assessment are presented below (a) student learning outcomes, (b) faculty quality, and (c) program quality. These categories are not viewed as discrete but rather interrelated components. Each contributes to answering the important question of the degree to which our graduate programs achieve their shared goal of producing graduates who not only can demonstrate the relevant subject matter competence expertise, but are articulate, critical thinkers.

We subscribe to the philosophical conviction that the quality of teaching is inextricably connected to the quality of student learning. Thus, while we recognize the importance of student learning outcomes as one component of program assessment, we avoid reliance on this measure alone as we engage in a critical, comprehensive analysis of the quality of our graduate programs and our graduate students.

This document is a summary of the various assessment methods, some of which have been completed for many years and continue to be a source of information. Other methodology for data collection is underway with the expectation that the outcomes of the assessment would be incorporated into the self-study document. A few assessment methods listed in this document are viewed as desirable and may occur in the future but are not pursued at this time because of budget constraints. It should also be noted that the graduate programs are diverse and approach assessment of their program goals in various ways. The listing that follows reflects a composite of methods and should not be construed to mean that each program completes each assessment measure.

For each assessment effort, the following information is provided:

- (1) the purpose of the assessment;
- (2) a brief statement of methodology;
- (3) the office or persons responsible for gathering and analyzing the data (underlined); and
- (4) the status of the assessment method.

Assessment of Student Quality and Student Learning

1. ***The culminating experience (the thesis, project or comprehensive examination)***. The purpose is to assess the quality of students' overall learning resulting from their graduate programs. The culminating experience is designed specifically to provide evidence of written expression, research methodology and data analysis, mastery of advanced disciplinary knowledge, critical and creative thinking, integration of theory and practice, and other elements related to specific disciplines. The Graduate Council establishes expectations for quality and guidelines for completion. Thesis/Project Chair, Departmental Faculty, and Graduate Dean. Ongoing.

Analysis of Theses and Projects

The culminating experience is viewed by the faculty as the single most important element of graduate programs and one that distinguishes graduate from undergraduate education. The graduate thesis and project as well as the comprehensive examination are highly individualized, rigorous experiences developed to enhance and develop student learning. This culminating experience is the most

learning-centered component of graduate programs and is the element used most frequently to assess quality of graduate students and their work. Thus, high standards indicative of excellent graduate education are established and maintained for the culminating experiences, especially theses and projects. Supporting this method is the "Thesis and Project Requirements," approved in 1994 and most recently revised in July 1999. This document is used to guide students and chairs of thesis/project committees and the Dean of Graduate Studies in evaluating theses/projects to ensure that the high standards set forth in the document are met. Additionally, the document "Master's Degree Program Guidelines for Thesis or Project" was initiated in July 1997 and updated in April 2000. This document provides thorough explanation and guidance for development and production of quality theses and projects enhances the quality of culminating experiences and, therefore, of the graduate programs.

For AY 1998-99, seventy-eight theses and 29 projects were submitted and judged to have met the quality standards for graduation. Some of the first submissions of the MSW program resulted in some difficulty with regard to format, methodology, instrumentation, and statistical analyses. Through revision and resubmission, these problems were remediated and preventive measures implemented for future submissions.

2. ***Oral public defense of thesis and project.*** The purpose is to provide evidence of oral expression, mastery of subject matter, research methodology or theoretical constructs, critical and creative thinking, mastery of advanced disciplinary knowledge, and other elements related to specific disciplines (such as performing arts). Oral defense is required for the thesis and optional for the project. The Graduate Council will consider a proposal to require an oral, public defense as a mandatory part of the master's degree for both thesis and project. Thesis/Project Chair, Departmental Faculty, and Graduate Dean. Ongoing for some programs; underway for others.

3. ***Student portfolios.*** The purpose is to provide evidence of student growth throughout their graduate experience. Randomly selected students will be asked at the beginning of their programs to keep a portfolio of papers, research reports, examinations and other evidence of student learning in accordance with requirements established by the Graduate Council. Graduate Dean and Review Committee. Initiated fall 1997 with volunteer graduate students; a protocol for the design of the student portfolio and a process for assessing the portfolio is in draft form.

4. ***Student achievement of program objectives.*** The purpose is to assess the degree to which students achieved the stated program objectives. Possible use of national standardized tests may be used depending on common program objectives among the graduate programs. Graduate Directors. Ongoing for some programs; underway for others.

5. ***Graduate admission examinations.*** The purpose is to assess the degree of preparation for graduate studies as evidenced by scores on nationally-recognized admission tests. Analysis includes scores on GRE, MAT, and GMAT with analyses by program/discipline and comparisons made to CSU and national norms. Testing Office and Institutional Research. Ongoing for GRE; future need for other admission tests.

Analysis of Graduate Record Examination Scores

An analysis of scores on the Graduate Record Examination at the time of program entry indicates that the mean GRE score for graduate students is 460 verbal (national mean 479), 467

quantitative (national mean 555), and 509 analytical (national mean 543). Marine science students exceeded campus and national averages on all three measures; English students exceeded campus and national verbal and analytical scores, and psychology students exceeded the campus and national analytical scores. Generally, GRE scores are required as part of the admission criteria, but the faculty have insisted that no absolute minimum scores are established for program admission decisions. Instead the GRE is used as one indicator along with other criteria for making student admission decisions. For admission to the MBA, a minimum score of 450 on the Graduate Admissions Management test is required for program. For the past three years, these students' MAT mean scores were 460 (national average 550).

6. ***Grade Point Average.*** The purpose is to assess the academic performance of students within the graduate programs. Requires analyses by discipline and other variables (on-site, Stockton, ITV) as compared to benchmark measures such as system, state, or national norms. Institutional Research. Ongoing for academic discipline overall; future need for analyses for graduate programs, other variables, and for benchmark measures.

Analysis of Grade Point Averages

The required overall GPA (consisting of undergraduate and post-baccalaureate coursework) for graduate students at time of entry into a graduate program is a minimum of 3.0. Overall graduate students' GPA at the completion of the program was 3.69 in fall 1997. Approximately 24% of the graduate students at commencement are awarded honors which means their GPA is 3.9 or above.

Assessment Measures of Faculty Quality

7. ***Students' perceptions of course quality.*** The purpose is to seek students' perceptions of the quality of their coursework. Requires random sampling of the University-approved course evaluation form (currently IDEA) of graduate courses, using IDEA items 1-10. Institutional Research. Future need.

Analysis of IDEA scores for graduate courses

The analysis of IDEA scores for 51 graduate courses taught during the Fall 1997 indicates that 712 graduate students over all had a positive assessment of the quality of the courses in terms of the courses' stated objective. For example, 66% rated the course at the highest level and 93% at the average to highest levels.

The students' assessments with regard to the degree that the course improved their attitude toward the field of study yielded similar results with 56% at the highest levels and 95% at the average to highest levels.

For items on the IDEA that assess students' perceptions of faculty quality with regard to teaching methods, the results indicate less agreement among graduate students: 45% rating the professors at the highest levels, 39% average, and 16% at the lowest levels.

On the IDEA forms, faculty are asked to identify the key objectives for graduate courses. An analysis of their responses indicate that overall faculty tended to rate objectives related to subject matter mastery as essential or important. These included developing professional skills (88%), gaining factual knowledge (72%), learning fundamental principles and theories (72%). One of these objectives, learning the process of the discipline's methods, was rated somewhat low in importance (39%). The course objectives that received the lowest citation for importance for graduate courses were developing effective communication skills (39%) and developing creative capacities (14%). Objectives related to the personal development of students were rated low with percentage of importance ranging from 37% to 14%.

When students were asked to rate their courses on a 5-point scale with regard to meeting the essential/important objectives, their overall assessment was high, with means on various ideas ranging from 4.0 to 4.3.

Differences in responses based on the college of the student indicated overall ratings tended to be highest for Education (283 students in 19 courses) followed closely by Arts, Letters, and Sciences (328 students in 27 courses). Ratings for Business Administration (101 students in 5 courses)

were comparable to the other two colleges in terms of overall evaluation of achievement of course objectives, but were substantially lower in response to questions of improved attitude toward field and excellence of teaching.

Findings also include the percentage of faculty by rank who taught these graduate courses. Overall, 18% were taught by professors, 27% by associate professors, 33% by assistant professors, and 20% by visiting lecturers/instructors. Some differences are evident within the colleges within the lower faculty ranks but consistent in percentages for professor and associate professor ranks.

The information generated by the IDEA provides evidence overall of students' positive perceptions of the quality of graduate instruction; however, findings with regard to who is teaching graduate courses is of concern. Moreover, it is important to examine a possible discrepancy between the professors' identification of major objectives on the IDEA forms and those cited as important student outcomes and program objectives by the Graduate Council when it reviews course syllabi and conducts its program reviews.

8. ***Students' perceptions of faculty quality in fostering student learning.*** The purpose is to seek students' perceptions of the quality of faculty teaching graduate programs. Requires random sampling of IDEA results of graduate courses, using IDEA items 12-14. Institutional Research. Future need.

Analysis of IDEA

For items on the IDEA that assess students' perceptions of faculty quality with regard to teaching methods, the results indicate less a agreement among graduate students: 45% rating the professors at the highest levels, 39% average, and 16% at the lowest levels.

9. ***Faculty degrees, experience, and preparation.*** The purpose is to provide demographic data for faculty who teach graduate courses, including the number of faculty who have earned terminal degrees, the variety of institutions from which degrees were earned, and other variables related to faculty preparation and experience. Institutional Research. Future need.

Analysis of Faculty Characteristics

CSU Stanislaus does not have separate designations for graduate faculty; thus, except for social work which offers only a graduate program, most faculty teach both graduate and undergraduate. Faculty characteristics for graduate teaching then is used for the faculty as a whole. Data indicate that 95% (203 of 213) of the faculty hold doctorates, with a mixture of senior faculty with many years of experience complemented by those hired in the 1990s (7% were hired in 60s; 29% in 70s; 67% in 80s; and 37% in 90s). Faculty diversity in terms of the variety of institutions and the region of their degree indicate that 44% received their highest degree from the Pacific West (most from California and most from the University of California), 11% from the Mountain states, 17% from the Midwest, 24% from the East coast, and 4% from foreign universities.

10. ***Course syllabi.*** The purpose is to provide a sampling of course syllabi as a measure of faculty quality for instructional design. Departmental Faculty, Graduate Council, and Graduate Dean. Ongoing.

Analysis of Course Syllabi

Approved by the Graduate Council in 1994, the document "Criteria for Evaluation of Graduate Courses" lists criteria for graduate courses in general (i.e., criteria leading to greater depth, sophistication and mastery of learning by students in learning-centered courses) and criteria for specific types of graduate courses (graduate seminars, graduate laboratories, fieldwork and clinical practice, graduate independent study, the culminating experience and introductory graduate courses). Faculty have access to the criteria while preparing proposals, and proposals are uniformly evaluated and approved only when members are satisfied that criteria are met. The high quality of course syllabi are reflected in new course proposals.

11. **Faculty Portfolios.** The purpose is to develop a system for creation of a faculty portfolio or departmental portfolio as one element of demonstrating faculty quality in planning, course delivery, thoroughness of grading and assessment, extent and assessment of student writing and research, technological elements of course delivery and student assignments, and other measures. Faculty portfolios would include examples of examinations, research papers, and other course materials as appropriate to the discipline. Graduate Council, Graduate Dean, and External Review Committee. Future need.

12. **Retention, promotion, and tenure process and post-tenure review.** The purpose is to ensure that the process for making personnel decisions results in quality teaching at the graduate level. This includes a scrutiny of the process examining the ways in which an explicit assessment of faculty quality with regard to the graduate programs would enhance student learning. Besides procedures to ensure quality and a focus on student learning, data analysis might include a summary of the number of positive and negative personnel decisions. Graduate Council and Institutional Research. Future need.

13. **Research productivity.** The purpose is to provide evidence of faculty productivity in research, scholarship, and creative activity. Analysis to include the research productivity of faculty who teach graduate courses compared to faculty who teach undergraduate courses only using data from the 1994-95 Deans' Annual Reports (21 categories of research activities). Also evidenced in vitae of faculty. Graduate Directors and Institutional Research. Ongoing.

Analysis of Faculty Research

An analysis of the research completed by the faculty in 1996-97 indicates that 57% of the faculty (27 of 47) who taught at least one graduate course had a refereed, published scholarly work and 21% had an externally-funded grant.

Assessment of Program Quality

An audit of graduate programs shows that assessment ranges from negligible in some departments to a fairly well developed approach in others. Graduate coordinators/directors and administrators recognize the complexity of assessment and the importance of designing measures that are multidimensional, meaningful, and oriented toward program improvement and student learning. At this point, the faculty have established ongoing, thorough assessment of graduate students, faculty, and programs. Concurrently, the Graduate Council continues its discussion of the effectiveness of various assessment measures for yielding information helpful to improving our graduate programs.

Knowing both the importance of assessment and the uneven application of assessment by different graduate programs, the Graduate Council has endorsed a list of potential assessment goals for evaluation of all graduate

programs that are designed to provide thorough assessment of student quality, faculty quality and program quality throughout the graduate programs at CSU Stanislaus. The categories for assessment of student, faculty and program quality are viewed as interactive rather than discrete. Each contributes to ascertaining the degree to which our graduate programs achieve their shared goal of educating competent and educated graduate students.

14. ***Employer perceptions of graduate students.*** The purpose is to assess employers' perceptions of graduate student preparation, student learning, and program quality through a biannual survey of employers who hire our graduates. Institutional Research. Ongoing for some programs; underway for others.

15. ***Employment of graduate students.*** The purpose is to gauge the competitive preparation of graduate students for employment. Data collection to include the percentage of graduate students successful in securing positions and advancing within their employment/profession consistent with their academic preparation and career goals. Institutional Research. Future need.

16. ***Doctoral programs.*** The purpose is to gauge the competitive preparation of graduate students based upon their success rate in entering doctoral programs. Analysis to include the percentage of graduate students gaining entry and completing doctoral degrees. Graduate Directors and Institutional Research. Ongoing for some programs; underway for others.

17. ***Workload and operating budgets.*** The purpose is to provide a reflection of program quality and vitality, by assessing workload data including student/faculty ratios (SFR), ratio of full time to part time faculty teaching graduate courses, and FTEF/full and part time faculty in graduate programs. Budget data to include operating budgets and expenditure issues. Institutional Research. Future need.

18. ***Students' perceptions of program quality.*** The purpose is to ascertain students' perceptions of the quality of their graduate programs through an annual survey of students at graduation (exit survey) and three years after graduation (post-graduation/alumni survey). Included with application for graduation for graduate students. Graduate Office and Institutional Research. Ongoing for some programs; underway or development for others.

Analysis of Graduate Student Program Evaluation

An exit survey given to graduate students at the time of their graduation includes questions related to quality of program, courses, faculty, library, laboratories, and graduate office services. This data was analyzed in the aggregate, by program, and by graduation year. This information was provided to the graduate coordinators for review and provided guidance for improvement of program.

The responses of 110 students on a 5-point Likert scale indicate that 78% rated the overall quality of their program as excellent or good.

The highest ratings (excellent/good) were given as follows: commitment of faculty to the graduate program 84%, faculty qualifications 81%, library assistance 80%, usefulness of program for employment 76%, intellectual challenge of the program 74%, and teaching effectiveness 71%.

The items in which the excellent/good quality ratings were below 50% included career information provided by faculty 38%, physical facilities 46%, and equipment 42%.

These data were analyzed in the aggregate, by program, and by graduation year. This information was provided to the graduate coordinators for review and, as appropriate, provide guidance for improvement of program.

Analysis of Alumni Survey

A survey of alumni distributed three years after their receipt of a graduate degree yielded information about program and faculty quality. The survey asked alumni to respond to questions about the reasons and goals for their graduate degree, benefits, current employment, evaluation of program and faculty, personal feelings about university, and suggestions for improvement. The low response rate of 48 alumni out of 249 requests (from graduates 1993-1995) makes definitive judgments difficult but general indicators about program quality derived from these data for selected items follow.

Seventy-nine percent said if they had the opportunity to begin their degree over again, they would enroll at CSU Stanislaus, and 85% said their personal feelings about the degree program was either enthusiastically supportive or generally supportive with minor reservations.

The highest ratings (excellent/good) were given for overall quality of the program 67%, commitment of faculty to the graduate program 73%, intellectual challenge of the program 74%, teaching effectiveness 69%. The lowest quality rating (42%) was the "relationship of curriculum to the real world."

These data were analyzed in the aggregate, by program, and by graduation year. The information was provided to the graduate coordinators for review and, as appropriate, provide guidance for improvement of program.

While some variability in responses to similar questions exist in the responses of graduate student in comparison to alumni three years after graduation, overall the responses of both groups are similar and positive.

19. ***Academic Program Review.*** The purpose is for reflective self-study and institutional review of the quality of graduate programs. Academic program reviews are conducted every five years and include comprehensive review of program objectives, curriculum, faculty, students, and program resources. Departmental Faculty, Graduate Council, Graduate Dean, Provost, and President. Ongoing.

Analysis of Academic Program Reviews

One of the most systematic and effective methods of assessing program quality and student learning goals is through academic program reviews. Although the Board of Trustees mandates periodic program reviews and these have been conducted at CSU Stanislaus on a 5-year rotation, the departmental reviews in the past have not always been completed with thoughtfulness and scrutiny. In 1992, however, the University's program review procedures were modified so as to require departments to assess their programs' stated objectives, especially with regard to student learning. Review procedures are also responsive to the CSU Board of Trustees' advocacy of the comprehensive assessment of student learning as a core value guiding academic program reviews. Statistical information from the Office of Institutional Research is sent to departments conducting program reviews. The refinement of the procedures, criteria, and format for academic program reviews has

resulted in better preparation of documents, more serious discussions by program faculty and more comprehensive scrutiny by members the University Educational Policies Committee, the Graduate Council, the Faculty Budget Advisory Committee, and the administration.

20. **Accreditation.** As an assessment measure, one of the goals of accreditation is to ensure program quality as evidenced in the highest level of student achievement. Graduate programs with national accrediting bodies have or are seeking national accreditation. Departmental Faculty, Graduate Council, Graduate Dean, Provost, and President. Ongoing.

Analysis of Accreditation

We have secured accreditation for our graduate programs for which national, discipline accreditation is available. These include Education, Public Administration and Social Work. Programs in Business Administration and Accounting have completed the candidacy phase of accreditation and are now actively seeking final accreditation.

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