

## Graduate Program Assessment at Washington State University

While assessing student learning has always been an integral part of graduate education at Washington State University it is becoming increasingly important that the process and metrics be formalized and publically accessible. Assessment of Washington State University's Graduate Programs is intended to be a regular, ongoing, iterative process that identifies strengths and weaknesses of programs in achieving their intended outcomes and goals.

The overall purpose of program assessment and review is to evaluate each graduate program's quality and effectiveness, to stimulate program planning and improvement, and to encourage graduate degree programs to develop in directions that reflect the universities strategic priorities. Great research universities have great graduate programs, especially doctoral programs, which figure so prominently in university reputations. Planned program review and assessment ensures that each degree program systematically takes the time to evaluate challenges, strengths, weaknesses, and progress in achieving its goals. The principal criterion of a graduate program's academic excellence is the quality of its faculty, entering students, graduates, and the overall quality of the academic experience as perceived by those associated with the program both internally and externally. The assessment process will insure that the faculty members of the program are working effectively and students are receiving the best education possible.

Graduate program assessment at Washington State University includes four equally important phases

### **1. The development of a graduate program's assessment plan.**

The Graduate School mandates that each program have both clearly articulated learning outcomes and that these learning outcomes are available to all students. An ideal place to publish these outcomes would be in the Graduate Student Handbook that each unit should have in place.

What counts as *evidence of success*, with respect to graduate student learning outcomes, is properly the province of each graduate program's faculty with oversight from the Graduate School. Program faculty exercise their authority by establishing learning goals, designing courses appropriate to achieving those goals, and assessing student achievement of those goals using methods appropriate to the discipline. With this in mind the Graduate School has identified four points you should consider as you develop a learning outcome assessment plan:

- a. Beginning with the program's missions statement, determine the broad objectives that define what it means to be an effective program.
- b. Develop specific, measurable; outcomes that your program seeks to achieve that will meet the objectives.
- c. Determine the data that should be collected to determine if the program's outcomes are being achieved and what the sources of that data will be.

- d. Determine how often the data will be collected, who will be in charge of collection, analysis, and reporting.

## **2. The assessment review process.**

- a. Meet with the Director of Graduate Planning and Assessment to coordinate the assessment process at the beginning of the academic year your program is scheduled for assessment.
- b. Assign an assessment coordinator to work with the Director of Graduate Planning and Assessment to schedule surveys, focus groups, and other assessment process deemed necessary.
- c. Work in conjunction with the Director of Graduate Planning and Assessment to develop discipline specific questions that will add to the value of your assessment review.

## **3. The assessment review report**

The programs assessment review report should not exceed 10 pages and include the following sections: (1) Background, purpose, and goals of the program, (2) Data Collection, (3) Evaluation and Analysis (4) Graduate Program Assessment Summary (5) Recommendations and Action Plan.

### **a. Background, purpose, and goals of the program.**

A historical overview, mission, and description of how the program reflects the universities strategic priorities should be provided along with the scope and purpose of the assessment.

### **b. Data Collection**

Program profile data are sent to each department for validation before we begin the assessment review. The main purpose of the data provided by the Graduate School is to offer program faculty and the assessment team the ability to identify patterns and make preliminary observations that can guide the assessment process and the formulation of the assessment review. The program profile data should be used to generate questions, discussions and responses; they are not meant to provide definitive answers.

The Assessment Review Report is an opportunity for the department to describe, analyze and present additional data. The report should address what data was collected and who collected it? How was accuracy maintained? Are questionnaires and/or other survey instruments required and if so, who is responsible for their development? If interviews are required, who did was responsible? What is the time frame for collecting data? What procedures and methods were used to analyze the data?

### **c. Evaluation and Analysis**

Areas of assessment should be clearly stated in the report. They should include, but are not limited to; faculty, who they are and how they contribute to stated program goals along with relevant indicators of effectiveness: enrollment and related data: student information including academic preparation, demographics, and other

relevant information; information on who graduates, where they go for their first job after their degree is conferred, and how they are followed after graduation; indicators of teaching and learning effectiveness; relationship to other programs in the University and; other areas of evaluation deemed necessary by the faculty of the program.

1. Faculty:

- a. Who are the faculty both internal and external to your program that works with your graduate students?
- b. What (if anything) do your disciplinary/professional societies say about the future of your discipline and of graduate education in your discipline? What are the disciplinary capabilities of the faculty working with graduate students? What is missing from these capabilities given the future of your discipline?

2. Admissions Process

- a. What are your admissions criteria (and why)?
- b. What are the department's plans to increase diversity in order to meet employers' needs? What are the ongoing efforts by the department to recruit and/or retain minority graduate students? Women or men students (depending on the discipline)?
- c. What is the general quality of the applicants to your program's graduate applicant pool?

3. Curriculum and Training

- a. Does the education/training provided by the graduate program adequately prepare the graduate degree recipient to compete in the discipline as an equal both in depth of education/training and in breadth education/training with degree recipients from other institutions? (Ability to compete includes competition for employment, advancement, intellectual equality and professional recognition.) How do you know?
- b. How are the graduate students mentored so that they possess the extradisciplinary skills necessary for success throughout their professional careers? This includes a broad range of skills ranging from written and oral communication skills through management skills to the balancing of conflicting personal and professional priorities. How effective is your mentoring? How do you know?
- c. What do you know about your retention rates and patterns that would indicate adequate mentoring? Is there any difference in retention of graduate students based on gender, race or ethnicity?
- d. What are the efforts to provide education in the area of responsible conduct of research? In teaching/pedagogy?
- e. Do you provide annual written evaluations?
- f. For which employment sector(s) do you train your students? What is the success in these sectors both in job placement and employer satisfaction? How do you know?
- g. Does your program have established connections that permit and encourage education/training of the graduate degree recipient beyond the confines of the unit? How do you use those connections? How can they be improved to strengthen your graduate program? This component is

based on the premise that many of the problems that will be faced by graduate degree recipients will be between or beyond disciplines.

- h. How comfortable and competitive will your graduates be in a diverse global environment? How do you know?
- i. Is the process of graduate education “transparent?” Is your graduate handbook updated and available to students electronically?
- j. Does your program have the necessary infrastructure for a productive research and graduate education environment for the discipline and profession? These components might include post docs/research associates, technical and other staff support, research funding, adequate space, equipment, access to literature, etc. In addition, the resources to send graduate students to professional/disciplinary society meetings.

#### **4. Graduate Program Assessment Summary**

- a. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? How should programmatic strengths be reinforced and weaknesses addressed? What improvements are needed and what will be the long and short-term benefits? Will improvements require additional resources, or can improvements be made by reorganization (and/or both)?

#### **5. Recommendations and Action Plan**

The Director of Graduate Planning and Assessment will provide an assessment report that includes the graduate program’s assessment review, an evaluation of the graduate programs assessment process and data, an analysis of information collected by the Graduate Planning and Assessment during the assessment process, and recommendations to the Dean of the Graduate School and Vice-President of Research, Dean of College or Colleges that oversee the graduate program, Program Chair, and members of the Graduate Studies Committee.

The Action Plan should result in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department Chair or Program Director, the Dean of the College, the Graduate School Dean and the Provost. Plans should be as explicit as possible and address the areas needing improvement for the next 3 years. Address the future of your discipline and the areas of growth. Will your department be a part of this future? What would you need to do to attract 2-3 of the 50 very best graduate students in the U.S. or the world? How will you evaluate your progress? What specific metrics will you use to gauge your success?

#### **4. Review of the assessment process.**

The Director of Graduate Planning and Assessment will meet with the assessment team to review the assessment process and elicit feedback from the team about the assessment process. Areas to address will include but will not be limited to:

- a. What outcomes, preliminary timetable, methods should be part of a future plan? If the plan did not yield useful information, how can the assessment process itself be improved?
- b. Provide a description of additional assessments planned for the future.