



HPU Graduate Assessment

Overview

In Fall 2021, the Academic Assessment and Program Review Committee (AAPRC) reviewed the method used to assess graduate Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO). This review was precipitated by multiple factors including a growing number of graduate programs at HPU, different ILOs for graduate and undergraduate students, and disparate capstone requirements among programs at the graduate level (e.g. theses, projects, presentations, performances, portfolios). Importantly, data analysis, reporting, and “closing the loop” processes warranted dedicated, separate treatment of the ILO assessment outcomes from both graduate and undergraduate students. The AAPRC spoke with faculty and administrators from each of the existing graduate programs to solicit comments and edits. In short, rather than conducting an annual assessment of one graduate ILO each year, the AAPRC proposed a composite rubric with all four graduate ILOs combined into one straightforward document (see rubric below). This composite rubric would be used by faculty to assess the graduate ILOs at a single point during a student’s final coursework at HPU (e.g. final project or presentation, thesis defense). The new rubric was piloted beginning in Spring 2022. We report here ILO assessment data generated during Spring 2022 and from the first full academic year, AY 2022-2023, during which the new graduate rubric was deployed for assessment.

Method

The four graduate ILOs at HPU are Written Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, and Scholarly or Creative Mastery. While there is significant overlap in ILOs used to assess our undergraduate programs (four of the five undergraduate ILOs are the same), the expectations for graduate students are higher and we found that a “one size fits all” rubric didn’t work well for both the graduate and undergraduate populations. In addition, the culminating capstone projects at the graduate level are so different from undergraduate capstones that applying our standard undergraduate rubric wasn’t very effective. In addition, any intervention as a result of assessment outcomes would necessarily need to be addressed differently for graduate and undergraduate programs. Therefore, the AAPRC devised a single graduate-level rubric, Figure 1, which can be used by assessors to score graduate students on all ILOs at one time, typically at the culmination of their graduate degree.

The AAPRC deployed the graduate rubric in Spring 2022 and AY 22-23. Specifically, at mid-semester, the College or School’s AAPRC representative notified their graduate faculty that an assessment was due for students completing their programs. Graduate faculty were asked to use the new rubric for assessing

students in their capstone course, thesis defense, portfolio review, etc. To make the process as uncomplicated as possible, this initial trial was conducted manually: faculty were asked to print and mark the rubric document or edit the Word document with their scores and return the rubric to the AAPRC co-chair along with a writing sample for assessment archives (e.g. abstract or conclusion section from a thesis or a final written project). For those programs in which graduate students have a committee of multiple readers, all committee members were invited to use the rubric and the scores for that student averaged for this report. It is the intention in the future to import the final rubric into Watermark so that faculty can upload the written samples and score against the rubric using the Watermark software as is done for several of the undergraduate ILO assessment projects.

Assessment Findings

In Spring 2022, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023, the work of 53 graduate students was assessed against the new rubric and written artifacts were collected and archived. This sample represents 47 Master’s students from six programs (MA Sustainability, MA Diplomacy and Military Studies, MA Strategic Communication, MS Marine Science, MA Business Administration, Master’s Public Health) and six Doctoral students from the Doctorate in Nursing Practice. Table 1 shows the number of students who scored in each of the four rubric categories across each rubric criterion. Table 2 presents the mean Master’s ($n=47$) and Doctoral ($n=6$) scores (mean \pm stdev) for each rubric criterion.

Table 1. Number of Graduate Students Scoring in each Rubric Category (n=53)

| Rubric Criteria | Number of Students Scoring in Each Category | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | <i>1-Deficient</i> | <i>2-Acceptable</i> | <i>3-Proficient</i> | <i>4-Exemplary</i> |
| Scholarly Mastery | 4 | 17 | 20 | 12 |
| Critical Thinking | 4 | 17 | 18 | 14 |
| Written Communication | 1 | 21 | 18 | 13 |
| Oral Communication* | 2 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Information Literacy | 1 | 19 | 18 | 15 |

*see note in the Discussion: oral communication is not a graduate ILO but was assessed for some students who presented their capstone orally

Table 2. Mean scores in each Rubric Category for the Masters and Doctoral Candidates

| Rubric Criteria | Scholarly Mastery | Critical Thinking | Written Communication | Oral Communication* (if applicable) | Information Literacy |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Masters, $n=47$ | 2.7 \pm 0.8 | 2.8 \pm 0.8 | 2.8 \pm 0.7 | 2.9 \pm 0.8 | 2.8 \pm 0.8 |
| Doctoral, $n=6$ | 4 \pm 0 | 4 \pm 0 | 4 \pm 0 | 4 \pm 0 | 4 \pm 0 |

*see note in Discussion: oral communication is not a graduate ILO but was assessed for some students who presented their capstone orally

Discussion

- *How closely do we think these findings reflect the actual level of competence of our students?*
 - This report primarily conveys work completed by the AAPRC to update the procedures for graduate student assessment. Therefore, there was no preset target for graduate student performance that could be used as a benchmark. However, we did take the opportunity to analyze the assessment data collected during the project. All of the Doctoral candidates scored “Exemplary” in all rubric categories. In addition, the mean scores for the Master's candidates closely approached “Proficient” in every rubric category. These data indicate a strong performance by our graduate students with some room for improvement at the Masters level.
 - We feel this level of performance does reflect our graduate student competency, on average, and posit that much more participation from our growing graduate programs will be necessary for graduate assessment results to be meaningful.
- *Were there any problems with the process?*
 - Oral communication is not an HPU graduate ILO. However, it was included on the “test” rubric because the AAPRC realized that there are often oral presentations of theses or final projects and that additional data on our students’ oral communication could be collected opportunistically. We included the data here because it had been collected but found that this caused some confusion during scoring and reporting this assessment data. Because oral communication is NOT a graduate ILO, it was decided that the AAPRC would remove this criterion from the rubric. Oral communication can be assessed at the Program level if that is desired by an individual graduate program.
 - Conducting these assessments manually with a paper rubric wasn’t ideal but was certainly adequate for testing out a new rubric. Starting in spring 2024, the rubric will be entered into Watermark Outcomes Assessment Projects where faculty conducting the scoring can enter scores in real-time as well as upload a writing sample for archival purposes.

Closing the Loop

- *How shall we use these findings?*
 - The new rubric will be amended to remove Oral Communication and forwarded to graduate faculty in preparation for Spring 2024 assessments.
 - This report will be distributed to graduate programs along with the updated rubric for use in their Program Review self-study and/or outside accreditation reporting. This report will also be uploaded to our Student Success website to make public the graduate ILO assessment results.
 - The AAPRC will report these results to the University during our annual Assessment day
- *Are we satisfied with the results? If not, what are we going to do about it?*
 - The AAPRC recommends that graduate programs begin to explore why Master’s candidates did not show proficiency for any ILO. To that end, the AAPRC will create a subcommittee of graduate faculty and administrators overseeing graduate programs to address this finding. The subcommittee chair will then reach out to all graduate program

chairs to discuss this finding and make suggestions as to how the program might address this shortcoming in their individual disciplines.

- The AAPRC will continue to collect and report out graduate ILO assessment data using this updated process. Assessment results from this project will provide a baseline or starting point from which our new and legacy graduate programs may begin to determine annual trends in student performance on all four graduate ILOs.



Graduate ILO Assessment Rubric

Degree (circle one): Masters Doctorate

Year-Semester/Term: _____

Committee Chair or Capstone Course Instructor: _____

College or School: _____ Department or Program: _____

Name of Evaluator: _____

Directions to Evaluators: Place a checkmark on the line in front of the rubric description for each Institutional Learning Outcome Assessment that best reflects the quality and level of achievement related to the report, thesis, dissertation, or portfolio as required in the capstone course and/or graduate program requirements. Feel free to copy this form if there is more than one evaluator. Please scan and send the completed rubric(s) along with a student's writing sample (e.g. abstract, discussion section, report section, portfolio) to the AAPRC co-chairs for archiving in Watermark. **Note:** if there is no requirement for an oral defense or presentation, please mark the oral defense line "NA".

| | 1. Deficient | 2. Acceptable | 3. Proficient | 4. Exemplary |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Scholarly Mastery: capstone project (thesis, portfolio, professional paper, or performance) demonstrates advanced knowledge, skills, and perspectives that contribute to their discipline | | | | |
| Level of knowledge reflected in the written document (e.g. report, thesis, dissertation, or portfolio) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects an unacceptably low level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects acceptable level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects above-average level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects outstanding level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. |
| Level of knowledge reflected in the oral presentation and/or defense | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects an unacceptably low level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects acceptable level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects above-average level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects outstanding level of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. |

| | 1. Deficient | 2. Acceptable | 3. Proficient | 4. Exemplary |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical Thinking: identify and explain issues, analyze evidence, assess assumptions, define their perspectives and positions, and present the implications and consequences of their conclusions</i> | | | | |
| Level of critical thinking reflected in the written document (e.g. report, thesis, dissertation, or portfolio) | __ Reflects an unacceptably low level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects acceptable level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects above-average level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects outstanding level of critical thinking. |
| Level of critical thinking reflected in the oral presentation and/or defense. | __ Reflects an unacceptably low level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects acceptable level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects above-average level of critical thinking. | __ Reflects outstanding level of critical thinking. |
| <i>Communication Written and Oral: The ability to organize their thoughts and feelings, synthesize relevant information and concepts, and effectively, clearly, and persuasively communicate their perspectives through written language and spoken format.</i> | | | | |
| Level of communication skill reflected in the written document (e.g. report, thesis, dissertation, or portfolio) | __ Reflects an unacceptable ability to express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally in writing. | __ Reflects an acceptable ability to express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally in writing. | __ Reflects above-average ability to express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally in writing. | __ Reflects outstanding ability to express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally in writing. |
| Level of communication skills reflected in the oral presentation and/or defense. | __ Reflects an unacceptable ability to orally express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally. | __ Reflects an acceptable ability to orally express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally. | __ Reflects above-average ability to orally express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally. | __ Reflects outstanding ability to orally express oneself clearly, accurately, and professionally. |
| <i>Information Literacy: The ability to recognize and articulate an information need, and to access, evaluate, and use relevant source material effectively, ethically, and legally in their academic pursuits.</i> | | | | |
| Level of skills reflected in the written document (e.g. report, thesis, dissertation, or portfolio) | __ Reflects an unacceptably low level of information literacy. | __ Reflects an acceptable level of information literacy. | __ Reflects an above-average level of information literacy. | __ Reflects an outstanding level of information literacy. |