

CHICO STATE UNIVERSITY
ASSESSMENT SUMMARY UPDATE

PROGRAM: MA/MS in INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (Grad Studies)

Year of review	Student Learning Outcome	Describe assessment activity done this year for this SLO	Findings	Based on the results or evidence, what action was taken regarding program improvements?
2013/2014	SLO #3 "Students can speak and write with sufficient clarity to convey their knowledge, attitudes, and skills."*	The oral thesis/project defenses of nine of the graduating IDST students were assessed using a rubric with a 4-point scale that rated presentations as Exceptional (4), Strong (3), Marginal (2), or Unacceptable (1) based on the students' ability to masterfully defend their research in a clear, articulate, insightful, detailed way in both their formal presentation and their fielding of questions. The thesis or projects were read prior to the defenses to help determine the effectiveness of the students' mastery of their knowledge (but were not independently scored).	Eight of the nine defenses were scored between 3.0 and 4.0 and thus considered to have successfully fulfilled the expectations of this SLO. The ninth defense was scored 2.0 or "marginal" based on the disorganization of the formal presentation. We noted that the presenter was also unduly nervous, and that while the presentation was less than stellar, the student did effectively field questions revealing a sufficient understanding of the project.	At this point, given that eight of the nine students were quite successful in their defenses, no action is needed in that regard. * However, after engaging in the assessment of this SLO, we realized that we needed to rewrite it to narrow the focus to just oral communication (SLO # 2 covers written communication). We revised it to: "Students will demonstrate advanced skills in oral presentation and communication commensurate with their disciplinary expectations" and will begin assessing it in the near future.

Year of review	Student Learning Outcome	Describe assessment activity done this year for this SLO	Findings	Based on the results or evidence, what action was taken regarding program improvements?
2013/2014	SLO # 1 "Students will develop programs of study that will be interdisciplinary, incorporating at least two disciplines in a meaningful program of study."	<p>The following materials were examined for 24 IDST students admitted between 2008-2012: (1) the students' justification statements, (2) original program plans, (3) dept. sign-off sheets, and (4) final program plans, (5) including the students' thesis or project abstract.</p> <p>We used a 4-point rubric to score the materials to determine if the students' programs were sufficiently interdisciplinary and resulted in meaningful achievement of student's academic objectives.</p> <p>Those program materials scoring 3.0-4.0 were deemed acceptable.</p>	<p>Of the 24 sets of student program materials assessed, eight were deemed "marginal" (scored 2.0 on a 4-point scale).</p> <p>In these cases, we saw that the original program plan had altered significantly over time due to course substitutions, committee member changes, and thesis/project topic changes. While most of these eight programs maintained curriculum that crossed at least two disciplines, we did see some diminishment in the number of courses shared across departments. We observed that these altered programs would perhaps affect the students' achievement of their original academic and professional goals.</p> <p>We also uncovered an unexpected result: of the 8 marginal program plans, only 1 was from a student admitted after 2011; the rest were students admitted prior to that.</p>	<p>Our unexpected SLO assessment finding (that 7 out of 8 "marginal" program plans were from students admitted prior to 2011) led us to wonder what the impact of these altered plans was on overall student success. We found that the cohort admitted in 2011 had a 75% graduation rate by 2014; those admitted in the years just prior to that had a 54% graduation rate.</p> <p>Of those not graduating, most had significantly altered their program plans. We suspect that part of the success of the 2011 cohort in creating and maintaining a consistent program plan (and thus a higher and faster graduation rate) was due to a new program coordinator who strengthened the admission requirements by demanding more detailed justification statements, well-vetted program plans, and signed support by program faculty and chairs. Future examination of graduation rates starting with cohorts admitted after 2011, will give us more information about whether this more demanding approach (that leads to better developed and supported program plans) is directly correlated to student success.</p>

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2014/2015	SLO#2 "Students can formulate hypothesis, construct research designs, and apply appropriate analytical skills to their disciplinary areas.	All 9 theses/projects submitted for fall 2013/spring 2014 were examined and ratings were given in three areas ranging from "fail" to "below average" to "average" to "above average." Only one thesis failed to pass with an average or above rating. As a result 8 out of 9 thesis/projects got a full "pass."	The one document that did not receive a full pass was a technical project that combined animation and computer programming to help computer animators learn new skills. The author struggled to offer a well-developed analysis. This seemed due less to the student's writing skills and more to the nature of the project which would make analysis more difficult than perhaps a typical thesis. Other project authors may be struggling with the same issue.	We plan to conduct assessment of this SLO several more times over subsequent years to determine if this is an isolated case or a more systematic issue. We also realized that our SLO needed to be revised to more accurately reflect what we wanted to assess (for example, only some students' approach require that they "formulate a hypothesis" instead of a research question). The newly developed SLO will be assessed in the next cycle.*
2015/2016	SLO #2 "Students can demonstrate the ability to produce scholarly research relevant to their disciplinary fields, utilizing appropriate methods and engaging in theoretical application to practice, advanced data analysis, and sound academic writing. (*This is the revised SLO.)	This SLO was assessed by examining the 9 theses and projects submitted by IDST students fall 2015 and spring/summer 2016 using a 4-point rubric to score each of six areas: (1) Research Question/Problem/Hypothesis; (2) Literature Review; (3) Methodology; (4) Results and Implications; (5) Format, Style, Organization; & (6) Impact of Research on the Field. Each section was scored either 1=unacceptable; 2=marginal; 3=strong; and 4=exceptional.	These theses and projects succeeded in most categories, with an average score in each section ranging from 2.8 to 3.1 (strong achievement). Despite these favorable ratings, an issue was revealed regarding Chapter 1. Rather than introducing the research questions with a solid problem statement, purpose of the study, and scope of project, in a few cases, Chapter 1 was similar to the literature review Chapter 2.	The Graduate Studies Thesis Editor/Advisor is revising the thesis/project workshops to spend more time offering additional instruction regarding how to develop Chapter 1 to offer a detailed introduction and more clearly distinguish it from Chapter 2. The findings do warrant analyzing SLO #2 again in AY 2016-2017 to see if a pattern emerges. Interestingly, the analysis problem we found in one project last year did not remerge so no action will be taken in that regard at this time.

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2016/2017	SLO #2 "Students can demonstrate the ability to produce scholarly research relevant to their disciplinary fields, utilizing appropriate methods and engaging in theoretical application to practice, advanced data analysis, and sound academic writing.	This SLO was assessed by examining the 5 theses or projects submitted by IDST students fall 2016 and spring/summer 2017 using a 4-point rubric to score each of six areas: (1) Research Question/Problem/Hypothesis; (2) Literature Review; (3) Methodology; (4) Results and Implications; (5) Format, Style, Organization; & (6) Impact of Research on the Field. Each section was scored either 1=unacceptable; 2=marginal; 3=strong; and 4=exceptional.	The same pattern from 2015-2016 emerged in these selections of theses & projects. Rather than Chapter 1 introducing the hypothesis/research questions with a solid problem statement, purpose of study, and scope of the project, Chapter 1 quickly turned into a mini-Chapter Two Literature Review. It now becomes clear that students struggle in this area. Upon further reflection, it appeared that some of this result can be correlated with the actual thesis committee advisors and their own disciplinary expectations that differ from the standard Chapter 1.	<p>In order to ensure that all IDST students are given proper support to develop their first chapters in accordance with program expectations, the IDST coordinator/thesis advisor will develop tailored workshops and guides specifically for IDST students (instead of including them in the general population workshops as he did after last year's results) and work with the theses/project committee members (in particular disciplines) to make sure they, too, understand the expectation for a fully developed Chapter 1.</p> <p>It was also decided to change the rubric to eliminate the large gap between 3=strong and 2=marginal. In many cases the "strong" designation seemed too generous and the "marginal" too punitive when the work is actually "average."</p>