

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Summary

Indigenous Studies, PhD

College of Liberal Arts

AY 2017-2018

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1. Assessment information collected

There are three primary criteria used for evaluating student learning under the PhD in Indigenous Studies (and I will note here that these are similar to our other degree program, topically, in Cross-Cultural Studies (MA)):

1. Performance in academic coursework,
2. Successful completion of a comprehensive exam during the semester before graduation (or earlier), and,
3. Submission and successful defense of a final project dissertation, as determined by the student's graduate committee.

Student outcomes and assessment align with the mission and goals of the Indigenous Studies program, in addition to successful completion of coursework, assessment criteria and procedures include:

1. Ability to apply knowledge and skills gained in implementing practical solutions to real-world problems,
2. Compare and analyze the epistemological properties, worldviews and modes of transmission associated with various indigenous knowledge systems (Alaska emphasis),
3. Apply cross-cultural understandings and communication skills,
4. Effective collaboration with Indigenous peoples,
5. Apply principles of cross-cultural and indigenous research methodologies and methods,
6. Conduct research relevant to Alaska and the Arctic that contributes to cultural, practices, community well being, and quality of life.

Student outcomes of class-based learning are assessed through Comprehensive Exams as follows:

1. Research Proposal:

Through the work demonstrated in the research proposal, the student's committee is able to assess the scope, scale, applicability, and feasibility of the student's intended research. This comprehensive exam component measures the student's capacity for recognizing academic problems and social issues surrounding indigenous peoples and their lives (roles and wellbeing). Importantly, it also requires the student to demonstrate an understanding of the particulars of the issue, the interrelatedness of the issue's components, and initial ideas (theoretically and methodologically) for addressing these. Here is where the student can express their academic interest within the context of Indigenous Studies according to the focuses and expectations taught in our classes.

2. Literature Review:

The second of the academic papers that make up a comprehensive exam is the literature review. Here the student demonstrates their capacity to research earlier work related to or relevant to their own current work. Through this exercise and subsequent paper the student shows their capacity to perform pre-research to ensure that earlier work is not replicated. Additionally, the student is required to perform an assessment of the sources discovered and intended to be used in the student's PhD field research and dissertation. Through the literature review the student's awareness of prior research, knowledge of how to access relevant research materials, and how to assess their value critically.

3. Methodology:

The third academic paper is intended to make use of the first two, completing the comprehensive exam written requirements. Here the student provides a detailed explanation of their methodology, including how the methods are supported by the student's theoretical approach(es), how their theoretic approaches guide their choice and application of methods, and why the chosen methods are the most well suited to addressing the research questions, hypotheses, and/or academic problem addressed by the student.

Assessment:

The full graduate committee reviews, comments, and edits each of the comprehensive exam papers, providing advice throughout, and assessing the progress of the student according to factors that are determined for each student's research. As an inherently interdisciplinary program, the Indigenous Studies PhD requirements differ from student-to-student, and assessment is unique to each project, with an emphasis on the project's effects on the hosting research community. Common assessment points that can be applied to any project, such as the effective use of indigenous research methods, worldview considerations, and applicability/relevance of research, are applied to all students' projects. Gaps noted during these assessments are identified by the graduate committee, who then makes decisions regarding the filling of these gaps: revision of comprehensive exam papers, additional mini-papers within the comprehensive exam process that help to address specific issues, or the requirements to take additional class(es).

Oral exam:

The graduate committee also conducts and evaluates student outcomes through the Oral Comprehensive Exam. Here the students are required to present on their learning objectives of the comprehensive exam papers, and most importantly, here is where the graduate committee (along with an outside examiner) asks the student to elaborate on ideas presented in the written exams, and where the student is required to answer questions from the committee regarding their work in the exams, and on upcoming fieldwork. With the successful completion of the written and oral portions of the comprehensive exam process, the student is advanced to candidacy and is required to complete and Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of their proposed research (and research ethics is *highly important* to our department and is expected of all our graduate students).

Institutional Review Board process:

Committee chairs closely monitor a student's IRB application, the research process, and dissemination of research. The IRB is often the point where the student first thinks in great detail about the fieldwork aspect of their research, and the ethical considerations involved. As most of our students work with indigenous communities—especially Alaska Native communities—ethics is central to our curricula. This includes working *alongside* community members as research partners, sharing the research, allowing for community review and assessment, and disseminating the research effectively for the benefit of the community.

PhD Research Project Assessment:

The purpose of the project assessment is to evaluate the effects of a student's fieldwork on the community, in terms of its impacts—positive or negative—on community wellbeing, and its effectiveness on addressing social problems that may be the focus of a study. Research design assessments involve evaluating the effects of ongoing collaboration with villages including data collection, analysis, outcomes, findings, and dissemination to community and other research partners. Student researchers working in Alaskan communities are expected to 1) develop their community engagement plan early in the research process and 2) assess the impact of their engagement both in terms of the quality and rigor of their research, as well as the perceived/understood benefits of the research by the community. This is done in collaboration with the graduate committee, which can require revisions of the research plan according to the ethical principles of research with indigenous peoples.

Again, assessments within the Indigenous Studies PhD are three-pronged:

1. course performance assessment: grades, and qualitative follow-up discussions with students by their graduate committee chair,
2. comprehensive exams assessment: qualitative assessment of knowledge (including ethics) learned, and innovations developed, to address topics of focus in upcoming research, appropriate use of indigenous and related methodologies and theoretical approaches, and
3. PhD research project assessment: qualitative assessment of the value, effects, and

success of PhD project in academic and local community contexts.

Tracking of students following graduation:

Students are tracked following graduation through email inquiries regarding their employment and overall wellbeing. Most respond, but inevitably some few do not.

Seven Indigenous Studies PhD students have graduated during the period of this review (AY 2017-2018), and these were used for data collection. Each of these students was rated according to the categories above: coursework, comprehensive exam, and final project dissertation, according to the criteria 1-6 above (p.1). Of these six, all completed dissertations based on their community research, and all made use of interviews and surveys in their fieldwork. All completed their degrees much before the allowable period of time (10 years for a PhD according to the Graduate School). Of these graduates, three work at colleges or universities (two at UAF as faculty), one works with her regional Native nonprofit (in Alaska), two are schoolteachers (in Alaska), and one is self-employed and is using his PhD dissertation as the basis for a new volume on Indigenous Research Methods.

2. Conclusions drawn from the information summarized above

During the period covered in this review (2017-2018) there were two students who were expected to graduate, but who have not. One of these students has become inactive in the program and explained that it was due to financial issues. The other student who remained active has not completed the degree yet due to personal issues regarding work and family.

The students who did graduate during this period were assessed according to the gradual and step-by-step process of completing and being evaluated for work in classes, comprehensive exams, and the final project/thesis. Each was assessed to have met the standards of the Center for Cross-Cultural Research regarding research design, research ethics, applicability and feasibility of research, and dissemination of research (particularly to the host research community).

Students are not permitted to conduct research that does not account and prepare for the research standards and ethics of the Center for Cross-Cultural Research, the Institutional Review Board, and especially, the community. Therefore, all of our students successfully attained these conditions *before* participating in research, and their research and dissemination was assessed according to the factors described above to qualify them for their degree. Those deemed 'unready' are required to demonstrate achievements of these standards before they are permitted move to the fieldwork stage, or to their dissertation defense stage.

3. Curricular changes resulting from conclusions drawn above

As with our MA program in Cross-Cultural Studies, curricular changes are made in the Indigenous Studies PhD program semester-by-semester according to the evaluations provided by the students, instructor self-evaluations, and once or twice a year, an evaluation of classes overall. As student needs shift, and as social and cultural needs and concerns change regarding indigenous peoples and their communities, class curricula is revised, and new courses are created—first as special topics and then, if enough interest has been shown, as standard classes.

At the present these outcomes assessments are qualitatively evaluated at the level of course, graduate advisory committee, and departmental review. Besides the quantitative evaluations of the classes (in part) by students in our classes, we prefer to use qualitative categorical measures that more fully enable an understanding of student needs and learning outcomes—these are generally created by the instructor who best knows what kind of qualitative evaluation is most relevant and useful to their class. Once a year, the entire department reviews all class curricula together to assure that these curricula are timely, accurate, and useful to the student in the present.

We are confident in our approaches to student learning outcomes as expressed in our consistently high student evaluations, the positive feedback we receive from research communities and by our indigenous community partners, and by our attention to concerns of ethics and rigor in our students' cross-cultural and indigenous-oriented research.

4. Identify the faculty members involved in reaching the conclusions drawn above and agreeing upon the curricular changes resulting

Raymond Barnhardt, Emeritus

Richard Hum

Theresa John

Michael Koskey, chair (mid-2016 to present)

5. Has your SLOA plan been updated to include assessment of the program's Communication Plan, as required by Faculty Senate motion?

No it hasn't, but this will be done during the Program Review for this program in the required program review for 2018-19 (due 11/18). Rationale: I wasn't aware of this requirement established by Faculty Senate motion, though I don't claim to not have been informed somewhere (though I have no recollection of this addition). I will find out what this is, and what is required as a result.