

Northern Studies Program Outcomes Assessment

BA Program for Academic Years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

Northern Studies graduated five BA students during this two year period – three in 2011 and two in 2012. Our Outcomes Assessment includes assessment of the students' abilities exhibited in the capstone course for the major, *Senior Seminar in Northern Studies*, done by Dr. Mary Ehrlander, who teaches the course, and self-evaluations by the graduates of their skills and growth in the program, as well as their assessment of strengths and weaknesses in the program.

The following summarizes the evaluations completed by Dr. Mary Ehrlander:

Quality of writing, fluency and mechanics:

Dr. Ehrlander found that students generally had strong writing abilities upon beginning the class (she also has exposure to the students in another required class, *20th Century Circumpolar History*), and she observed growth in all students, with substantial growth in some. The senior seminar is writing intensive, so notable improvement can be discerned between the first draft and the final paper.

Analytical skills, including ability to formulate a problem, evaluate evidence, draw conclusions:

Dr. Ehrlander saw marked growth in analytical skills of three of the graduates while in the program; they had superb analytical skills upon completion of the program. She noted growth between drafts of papers with all the students. One student grew strikingly in his ability to analyze his topic and present his arguments in a balanced, scholarly tone, rather than merely advocating for his position.

Research skills, including use of primary sources, archival materials, interviews, journal articles, other scholarly sources:

All students demonstrated an ability to locate, incorporate and integrate a wide variety of sources, including primary (archival and newspaper sources) and secondary. Their required power point presentations of their final papers demonstrated strong research and analytical skills.

What is the nature of the contribution?

Three of the students contributed to knowledge and understanding of northern historical topics. Three set a very high standard for other students in the presentation of their papers (power point presentations). Three (not the same three) made especially strong contributions to class discussions. One was notably strong in her incorporation of knowledge and insight gained from her second major (Justice).

The Senior Seminar is stacked with the introductory seminar to the MA in Northern Studies. Thus these seniors take the class with entering graduate students. All five of them performed very well under these circumstances. They made valuable contributions to class discussions, and their oral presentations (final research paper and others) were comparable to those of the graduate students. Two were among the strongest of all the power point presentations in their professionalism and analysis.

The following summarizes Student Self and Program Evaluations (4 graduates responded):

Have you seen growth in yourself as you have progressed through your program in Northern Studies? Please explain.

All students reported growth; the responses were so individualized that they cannot be aggregated well. Two noted growth in writing skills and two in critical thinking or analysis. Three specifically noted growth in public presentation skills. Two noted much growth in understanding of Alaska and northern issues of importance. One said she became a more knowledgeable, well-rounded person. One noted that she was encouraged to be a leader. One noted the benefits of interacting with graduate students. One noted growth from being encouraged to venture outside her academic comfort zone.

What are strengths of the BA in NORS, from your perspective?

Three students said that the faculty were the main strength of the program. Students identified Drs. Ehrlander, Cole and Koskey as especially supportive and knowledgeable. Students praised the mentorship they received in the program as well as the sense of community they felt. One student wrote that NORS creates an encouraging environment that fosters creative thought and academic strength. One noted especially the encouragement of experiential learning, especially study abroad. All four students praised the flexibility of the program. Three specifically mentioned the interdisciplinary nature of the program that allowed growth in multiple fields and strengthened their overall understanding of the north.

Weaknesses of the program: Critiques were completely individualized, though in general students had far fewer examples of weaknesses than strengths.

1. The program hasn't tried hard enough to attract students.
2. More emphasis should be placed on theoretical frameworks for understanding the north so that students are more prepared for graduate school.
3. The program seems not to be well enough funded (faculty are stretched too thin).
4. ANL 315 (Eskimo language) should not be required.
5. NORS should have an introductory seminar and more NORS centric courses (rather than students mostly taking courses in a variety of classes).
6. NORS should reach broader than CLA and include courses in, for instance, economics and the sciences.

Have you derived value from the program re: preparation for graduate student, for work and/or making a contribution in the north?

Overwhelmingly students reported that they had derived great value from the NORS program; they gained broad understanding about the north as well as acquiring career-specific knowledge and skills. Two are headed for careers (already in a job or internship) with the National Park Service, and they mentioned having benefited from the NORS program in career preparation. Other comments included the following:

- Yes, I use my education every day.
- NORS was an exact fit for me.
- While in the program I've had many opportunities to travel, learn, create and work.
- I learned how to think academically.
- I've learned to understand the north in a global context.
- Yes, especially in two graduate level courses that exposed me to useful theoretical frameworks.
- Understanding colonial and frontier narratives will help me in participating in public policy decisions.
- Yes, I have received good preparation for graduate study and/or for commercial/entrepreneurial or military work in the north.
- I don't think I would have ever graduated if it hadn't been for NORS.

Conclusions and Programmatic Revisions:

All students reported that they benefited from earning their degrees in Northern Studies; they stressed becoming more knowledgeable about the north in general as well as developing career-specific knowledge and skills. The majority noted growth in writing and/or analytical skills.

Strengths of the programs that the students identified focused on the program's flexibility and faculty strengths in subject matter and their caring attitudes and the mentoring they offered.

Weaknesses cannot be summarized easily. It is therefore more useful to identify changes that are in progress related to each of the criticisms students offered.

1. The program hasn't tried hard enough to attract students.
 - We are in fact "on probation" and working now to grow. We will be making more aggressive efforts to recruit.
 - We will be offering several courses on line next year, and we are working toward offering the whole degree online. This we expect will grow the program significantly.
2. More emphasis should be placed on theoretical frameworks for understanding the north so that students are more prepared for graduate school.
 - This is a valid critique, and I aim to emphasize theoretical frameworks for analysis more in Senior Seminar and will encourage other faculty to do so in their classes.
3. The program seems not to be well enough funded (faculty are stretched too thin).
 - Well, yes, we are stretched thin.

4. ANL 315 (Eskimo language) should not be required.
 - We plan to exchange this requirement, which hasn't worked well for our students, because of the emphasis on linguistics, for a course on northern communities taught by sociologist Sine Anahita, who is now NORS faculty.
5. NORS should have an introductory seminar and more NORS centric courses (rather than students mostly taking courses in a variety of classes).
 - Dr. Ehrlander is currently designing NORS 293, *The Circumpolar North: An Introductory Overview* for distance delivery and will pilot it in Fall 2012.
 - We plan to make it a required introductory course to the major the following year.
6. NORS should reach broader than CLA and include courses in, for instance, economics and the sciences.
 - In the 1990s NORS had an economics course, and we lost it when Economics professor Colin Reed left.
 - We aim to talk with faculty in Economics about whether they would be interested in developing a northern economics course to cross-list with NORS. We recognize that we need it.
 - Students are required to take BIOL 104 *Natural History of Alaska*. We also have a course newly developed by Dr. Maribeth Murray: *The Changing Arctic*, which addresses the physical environment in the arctic. We do not have plans to expand further into the hard sciences, as this is social sciences and humanities centered program. Students may take courses in the sciences as electives and in their minors, in accordance with their interests.

Thus the students' critiques of the program aligned remarkably well with weaknesses we have already identified and are addressing.

Attachments:

- List of NORS graduates 2010-2011 and 2011-2012
- Rubric for faculty evaluations of students' abilities, progress and contribution
- Rubric for student self-evaluations

Attachment A – list of Northern Studies BA Graduates 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

May 2011 Graduates:

Lisbet Norris
Macy Possenti
Cynthia Quinn

May 2012 Graduates:

Christopher Behnke
Harland Gustafson

Appendix B: Rubric for Evaluation of Student Performance and Growth in NORS Senior Seminar

Student Name _____ **Evaluation by:** _____ --

Rubric for Research Paper in Senior Seminar in Northern Studies

Quality of writing, fluency and mechanics

(provide narrative analysis including examples)

Analytical skills: this includes ability to formulate a problem, evaluate evidence, draw conclusions
(provide examples)

Research skills: this includes use of primary sources, archival materials, interviews, journal articles, and other scholarly sources (provide examples)

What is the nature of the student's contribution?

Appendix C: Rubric for Student Self Evaluation and Program Evaluation – NORS BA

Student Name _____

Rubric for Student Self Evaluation and Program Evaluation – NORS BA

Have you seen growth in yourself as you have progressed through your program in Northern Studies?
Please explain.

What are the strengths of the BA in Northern Studies, from your perspective?

What weaknesses have you perceived in the program?

Have you derived value from the program in terms of preparation for graduate study, for work and/or for making a contribution as a resident in the north? If so, please explain in what ways. If not, please explain what would have prepared you better.