**Report on Graduate Core Competency**

**Discipline-Specific Methodology**

**Graduate Core Competency Assessment, AY 2021-22**

Reported by **Graduate Core Competency Chair, Dr. Jessica Hannigan and**

**University Faculty Director of Assessment, Dr. Douglas Fraleigh**

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

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Fresno State Logo

**Report on the Assessment of**

**Graduate Programs Discipline-Specific Methodology**

**California State University, Fresno**

**July 1, 2022**

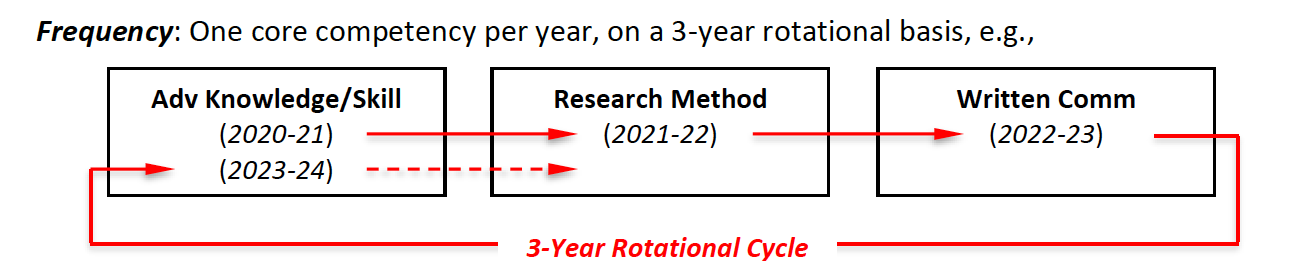
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Background**

WSCUC Standard of Accreditation 4.1 requires that “the institution employs a deliberate set of quality-assurance processes in both academic and non-academic areas, including … assessment of student learning.” At the undergraduate level, WSCUC Criteria for Review 2.2a requires that “programs ensure the development of core competencies including, but not limited to, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking.” At the graduate level, the WSCUC *2013 Handbook of Accreditation* provides that “graduate programs and graduate-only institutions are expected to define and assess the generic intellectual competencies that are foundational in their field. WSCUC Criteria for Review 2.2b provides that programs must “establish clearly stated objectives differentiated from and more advanced than undergraduate programs in terms ... student learning outcomes.”

At a graduate faculty meeting in Fall of 2016, University Director of Assessment, Dr. Melissa Jordine, discussed this issue thoroughly with the faculty who attended. A majority of those faculty agreed to provide feedback on potential graduate core competencies to be assessed University-wide. A Qualtrics survey based upon this discussion was created and sent to all faculty members, including those who had not attended the graduate meeting. The responses indicated a clear consensus of opinion. Nearly all respondents, with two exceptions, recommended adopting three core competencies--written communication, advanced disciplinary knowledge or skill, and research/discipline-specific methodology.

At a March 4, 2020 Graduate Coordinators’ meeting, a plan for graduate core competency assessment was established. The plan included a rotation through three graduate core competencies 1) Advanced Disciplinary Knowledge/Skill, 2) Research Method (Discipline-Specific Methodology), and 3) Written Communication. In 2019, a pilot assessment of written communication was conducted and feedback was attained to ensure the graduate core competencies captured a wide spread of disciplines and their culminating exercises across the university. In 2020, Advanced Knowledge/Skill graduate core competency was implemented and findings were shared in an executive summary dated August 9, 2021. In 2021-2022, Discipline-Specific Methodology graduate core competency was implemented and findings are shared in this executive summary. In 2022-2023, the core competency Written Communication will be implemented and the rotation will continue. Each of the three graduate core competencies will be assessed on a rotating basis:



Specifically, in each rotationation cycle:

* Graduate students’ culminating experiences will be evaluated for the corresponding core competency being assessed.
* If a graduate program had less than ten students graduate in a given year (summer, fall, and spring), then all culminating experiences will be assessed. If a program has ten or more students graduate, then ten culminating experiences will be randomly selected for assessment.
* A common rubric will be utilized for each core competency and used to assess students’ performance. Each graduate core competency rubric was developed based on graduate coordinators’ feedback and finalized by the university assessment coordinator subcommittee.
* A reporting form will be provided to each graduate coordinator. After faculty score the students’ work and provide comments, the form will be returned to the Core Competency Assessment Chair and University Director of Assessment.

**Graduate Programs Discipline-Specific Evaluation Process**

For AY 2021-22, Discipline-Specific Methodology was assessed. The assessment was overseen by the Director of Assessment, Dr. Douglas Fraleigh, and chaired by the Graduate Core Competency Chair, Dr. Jessica Hannigan. Students’ culminating experiences were assessed using a rubric developed collectively by the graduate coordinators (see Appendix A).

Students were assessed on three criteria, demonstration of discipline-specific methodology:

* Criteria 1. Appropriate discipline-specific methodology selection for scholarship.
* Criteria 2. Appropriate application of the discipline-specific methodology in the student’s scholarly or creative work.
* Criteria 3. Appropriate reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation on the application of the discipline-specific methodology.

Students received a score of 3 (advanced proficiency), 2 (proficiency), or 1 (partial proficiency) on each criterion. The benchmark was that 90% of students would receive a score of 2 (proficiency) or higher on all three criteria.

Graduate coordinators were provided a variety of professional learning opportunities throughout the 2021-2022 academic year to ensure they understood the process for implementing the graduate core competency evaluation. Dr Fraleigh and Dr. Hannigan presented the information at three separate university level graduate coordinator meetings (provided during the beginning, middle and end) of the academic school year. During these sessions, the why, what and how of the graduate core competency evaluation implementation was covered. In addition, reminder emails with specific instructions and opportunities for additional support were provided each semester to all graduate coordinators. In addition, a special graduate core competency support work session was provided in April 2022 to provide an additional opportunity to learn how to implement the graduate core competency evaluation. One on one coaching opportunities were also provided to graduate coordinators who requested one one one support throughout the academic school year.

**Results of the Graduate Programs Discipline-Specific Methodology Evaluation**

Table 1 shows the graduate core competency Discipline-Specific Methodology Evaluation submissions and results at Fresno State. The benchmark was that 90% of students would receive a score of 2 (proficiency) or higher on all three criteria. The sample size of N=293 submissions was representative of rubric submissions from 36 graduate programs across the university. Programs from each of the university’s eight colleges participated in the assessments. The results were as follows:

* ***Criteria 1 Proficiency (2 or above)***: 288, 98% of the submissions, earned a rating of 2 or higher.
* ***Criteria 2 Proficiency (2 or above)***: 289, 99% of the submissions, earned a rating of 2 or higher.
* ***Criteria 3 Proficiency (2 or above)***: 281, 96% of the submissions, earned a rating of 2 or higher.
* ***Overall Proficiency of (2 or above) for Criteria 1 - Criteria 3***: 279, 95% of the submissions earned of a rating of 2 or better on all three criteria.

**Based on the 90% benchmark, expectations were met for student proficiency in the Discipline-Specific Methodology Core Competency.**

**Table 1.** *Proficiency Scores Main Sample (*N*=293) (sample size is representative of submissions from 36 graduate programs)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sample** |  | **Criteria 1 Proficiency**  **(2 or above)** | **Criteria 2 Proficiency (2 or above)** | **Criteria 3 Proficiency**  **(2 or above)** | **Overall Proficiency Criteria 1-3**  **(2 or above on all three criteria)** |
| **All Submissions**  Projects (118)  Thesis (63)  Comprehensive Exams (59)  Exit Seminar (10)  E-Portfolio (10)  Other Culminating Experience (33) | N = 293 | 288 | 289 | 281 | 279 |
| **Proficiency Benchmark is 90% or higher** |  | 98% | 99% | 96% | 95% |

Table 2 shows overall discipline-specific methodology graduate core competency themes and

faculty comments. It is important to note that 279 of the 293 submissions met the benchmark of

proficiency in each of the three criteria. However, there were some submissions that missed the

benchmark. Five culminating experiences did not meet criteria 1, four did not meet criteria 2,

and 12 did not meet criteria 3. Fourteen submissions did not meet the benchmark of satisfying

all three criteria. It is also important to note, that submissions not meeting criteria 3 (12

submissions) was higher than submissions not meeting criteria 1 and criteria 2, demonstrating a

need to help students with the appropriate reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation on the

application of the discipline-specific methodology.

Overall, based on faculty comments that accompanied graduate program submissions, input derived from the student rubric submissions, students demonstrated more strengths than areas of needs. Table 2 provides common themes and representative corresponding comments.

**Table 2.**

*Table of Overall Discipline-Specific Methodology Graduate Core Competency Themes and Faculty Comments*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **21-22 Discipline Specific Methodology** | |
| **Themes** | **Faculty Comments** |
| Selecting, Description, and Application of Methodology | * *Correct selection, description, and evaluation of research methodology* * *Students selected appropriate methodologies* * *Excellent job selecting, implementing, and executing their chosen methodology* * *Selected appropriate methodology* * *Demonstrates advanced level of knowledge together with application of knowledge* * *Selected appropriate methodology for our academic discipline* * *Applied appropriate qualitative methodology, insightful observations and interpretations of data* * *Meta-analysis question for project strong and well-developed* * *Used advanced tools and methods to study subject area (here, ecophysiological traits of pistachio trees)* * *Novel approach, methodology is appropriate and rather advanced* * *Passed national exam, excellent work in class* * *Did well in translating the research into the appropriate business analysis or plan* |
| Significance of Student Work, Connecting Theory to Practice | * *Connected project topics with inequities in the field* * *Critical for data acquisition and repeatability* * *Top culminating experiences developed recommendations that could be used in the field under study* * *Very solid theoretical works, close to publishable in peer reviewed journals* * *Won the poster presentation at CCRS* * *Project examined social workers attitudes and perceptions of homelessness, overall a strong project with implications for SW educators and practitioners* * *Policy analysis of Fresno County school district policies for discipline, examined policies that contribute to the school to prison pipeline and proposed changes that could reduce that effect* * *Very important topic (homeless youths with disabilities) and excellent choice of intervention* * *Application was thorough and discipline-specific (physical therapy), providing benefit to the field* |
| Deeper Analysis and Reflection (needs improvement) | * *Need for additional connection to evidence in the analysis, more in depth reflection* * *Areas that need improvement appear to be application and reflection/interpretation/analysis* * *Students also need to be reminded of the importance of critical thinking/analysis in all three of the culminating experience options* * *Would need significant rewriting to be publishable* |
| Graduate Writing Skills (needs improvement) | * *Would have benefited from greater attention to writing mechanics* * *Some minor development in research and writing needed* * *Could apply APA manual more consistently* * *Issues with clarity and sentence structure* |
| Ideas for Enhancing Student Understanding and Reasoning for Methodology Selection and Application (needs improvement) | * *Deeper analysis in the application section* * *Weakness is the reflection and interpretation of the selection process* * *Multiple revisions and guidance needed to gain adequate application and interpretation of results* * *Could improve on choice of data to better align with clients’ needs* |

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the benchmark established for proficiency, expectations **were met** for graduate student proficiency in the Discipline-Specific Methodology Core Competency. Based on faculty comments strengths emerged in several areas:

* Selection, Description, and Application of Methodology
* Significance of the Student Work
* Connecting Theory to Practice

Some areas for improvement included:

* Deeper Analysis and Reflection
* Graduate Writing Skills and Use of a Style Manual
* Understanding and Reasoning for Methodology Selection and Application

Based on this analysis, we have met the benchmark but there is always room for improvement. Some recommendations from this assessment include:

* Additional support for learning how to describe and align the methodology to the work product
* Work on analysis, reflection, and interpretation overall
* Graduate level academic writing support (grammar, structure, APA, or other professional writing modality support)
* Opportunities to explain the reasoning for the selection and application of the methodology

**Appendix A.**

**Graduate Core Competency: Discipline-Specific Methodology Rubric**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Advanced Proficiency (3) | Proficiency  (2) | Partial Proficiency (1) |
| Appropriate discipline-specific methodology selection for scholarship (i.e., project, thesis, portfolio, project report, comprehensive exam, program culminating assignment etc.) | Discipline-specific methodology selection is very clearly defined and described | Discipline-specific methodology selection is clearly described | Discipline-specific methodology selection is not clearly defined or described |
| Appropriate application of the discipline-specific methodology in the student’s scholarly or creative work | Application of the discipline-specific methodology is very well-aligned and described | Application of the discipline-specific methodology is clearly described | Application of the discipline-specific methodology is not well-aligned and described |
| Appropriate reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation on the application of the discipline-specific methodology | Excellent reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation for use of discipline-specific methodology and outcome | Reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation for use of discipline-specific methodology and outcome is evident | Reflection, analysis, and/or interpretation for use of discipline-specific methodology and outcome is not evident |