**MS Criminology Assessment Report for AY 2015-2016**

**1. What learning outcome(s) did you assess this year?**

The MS Criminology program assessed the following learning outcomes in AY 2015-16:

Learning Outcome 1: Discipline-related Research & Writing

Graduate Criminology students will demonstrate the ability to apply advanced discipline-related knowledge by successfully completing a written research proposal and a final research paper that meet the criteria as described in the Graduate Writing Skills Rubric.

\*We had intended to evaluate SLO 2 and SLO3 for AY 2015-16, but data and accurate measures were not available, we have since applied for a grant to make changes to rubrics and assessment, therefore, a new focus is changing our rubrics and data collection to be better equipped to assess learning outcomes in the coming years.

**2. What instruments did you use to assess them?**

The Criminology Master’s program continued collecting data on students’ writing skills in CRIM 200: Research Methodology by evaluating the papers students submitted using the graduate writing requirement evaluation rubric (Learning Outcome #1). These assignments were evaluated using the same graduate writing skills evaluation rubric used to evaluate the CRIM 200 papers.

Graduate Writing Evaluation

The students’ papers were collected and evaluated using an evaluation rubric that focused primarily on “Style/Format”, “Mechanics”, and “Content/Organization.” The AY 2015-16 data were pooled and analyzed in order to determine if there were any patterns in terms of student weaknesses or writing skill deficiencies. Based on our old rubric that is being revised, the scores of the writing evaluation will be compared to the GRE writing scores. These measures are in the process of being changed to reflect a more valid assessment of graduate student’s writing.

**3. What did you discover from these data?**

In order to quantitatively analyze students’ writing competencies after entering the graduate program, comparison was made between students’ GRE writing scores and CRIM 200 writing assignment scores. That is, their GRE writing scores were used as a pre-test and the CRIM 200 graduate writing requirement is used as a post-test.

Table 2 shows the students’ average GRE and the graduate writing requirement scores. The GRE writing scores were graded out of 6 points, while the graduate writing requirement scores were out of 4 points.

**Table 2. Average Writing Scores**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Average of**  **GRE Writing** | **Average of**  **Graduate writing Requirement** |
| 3.2 | 3.8 |

Figure 1 further examines how the student’s writing competencies changed after entering the graduate program by comparing their GRE writing scores and the graduate writing requirement scores. The GRE writing scores and the writing requirement scores were highly correlated. A majority (60%) of the students who had scored 3 or below prior to coming to the graduate program received a 3 or lower grade in their writing requirement exam, while those who had scored 4.0 or higher in the GRE writing exam most commonly received a grade of 3.5 or higher on the writing requirement exam in CRIM 200 (45%).

**Figure 1. GRE Writing Scores and Graduate Writing Requirement (GWR) Scores**

Such a result indicates that the enhanced writing assignments were particularly useful in corroborating the writing skills of those with limited writing competencies prior to coming to the graduate program. In other words, the data indicated that their writing skills on the GRE might potentially predict their performance on the Graduate Writing Requirement.

During the course of the 2016-17 academic year, the intention is to create a rubric that can track a pattern of improved writing skills over the course of the semester and also serve as a more valid measure of assessment. This process will be completed for each student learning outcome to ensure a more accurate assessment at the end of next year, and going forward. In sum, the data indicated that we can actually gauge student’s writing abilities from their application and see these demonstrated in the early part of the program, but these data fail to tell us much else, which is why a huge revision of rubrics is necessary.

**4. What changes did you make as a result of the findings?**

The quantitative analysis results of the students’ writing skills and their abilities to demonstrate discipline-related knowledge indicated that the enhanced writing requirement assessment is particularly effective for identifying and aiding those students with limited writing skills prior to coming to the graduate program, early on in their graduate career. However, the results also indicate that we need to create new measures including enhanced writing assignments and rubrics as useful pedagogical tools to develop students’ written communication competencies in different courses as well as rubrics by which to understand and assess student written communication development. The next year will be spent creating these assignments and rubrics in order to accurately make assessments of our program in the future. After notification that our department falls short in the accuracy and validity of the current mechanisms for assessment, the department applied for and received a grant specifically intended to revise our assessment measures and procedures because we realize the importance of such changes and are actively seeking to improve our measures in order to accurately access the development of our students through the course of their program.

**5. What assessment activities will you be conducting in the 2016-17 academic year?**

This year, the intention is to assess SLO #3 oral communication. This will be based in new rubrics and assignments created for this purpose. We also intend to have several faculty evaluate this outcome with the rubrics in order to make sure that we are in fact rating students appropriately based on the rubrics. CRIM 200 and CRIM 202 will be used in the 2016-17 academic year to assess SLO #3 oral communication.

**6. What progress have you made on items from your last program review action plan?**

**2016-17 Action Plan for MS in Criminology program. Progress is in bold.**

1. develop a formal orientation for incoming students; **Completed. We developed and implemented a formal orientation for new students**
2. develop new admissions and recruitment procedures; **This change has been completed. We clarified our standards for the GRE**
3. reexamine our comprehensive exam; **Complete. We have made stronger preparation for our students and made changes to our standards for assessment of the exams; allowing rewrites for those who only miss one or two questions rather than forcing students to return for a second semester upon only missing one or two questions.**
4. review our graduate level writing standards; **Complete. The standards and rubric are clear and work well for the graduate writing requirement. We are creating new rubrics in order to track writing standards throughout the graduate career.**
5. explore new ways to provide students with financial support; **In Progress. We applied for and received a grant last year for 10,000 dollars to assist with funding several graduate students in our department. We are looking into grants and other funding that can further support more students through the program.**
6. continue to review curricula and requirements; **Ongoing. The department also applied for and received a grant for a department retreat where the focus is solely our graduate program, assessing and discussing the curriculum, and overall creating more organization and improvement.**
7. introduce student progress reviews; **In Progress. This will be more strongly implemented once new rubrics are created.**
8. develop new models of advising/mentoring; **In Progress. We are working toward more faculty mentors for students. We have 5 new faculty members this year, which helps us in beginning to create a model of advising and mentoring for our grad students. This will be another part of our plan for the retreat to create a better model and more clear access to advising and mentoring for our students.**
9. increase graduate student research opportunities/IRB; **Complete and ongoing. Many faculty have grants and other opportunities for the students to engage in research.**
10. explore the feasibility of starting graduate program option development tracks; **Complete. At this time the option development tracks will not be implemented, however we are considering developing a research institute to further give students opportunities. We will be considering including different tracks during our faculty retreat this year, however this needs to be something that faculty agree on during our discussions of this option.**
11. draft a handbook for the Department Graduate Coordinator**; We have completed changes to our handbook for Fall 2016**
12. develop a Graduate Student Handbook; **Complete**
13. publish a Faculty Profile Handbook for students; **In Progress. We have begun a faculty profile for students but not yet created a formal handbook; this is in progress for the 17-18 AY.**
14. develop a graduate student webpage; **Not Started**
15. make formal assignments of faculty to graduate students. **Not Started. However this will be another point of discussion during our faculty retreat, we have a strong desire to increase faculty and graduate student mentorship and will be considering formal assignments.**

**Conclusion**

After receiving grants for assessment and a faculty retreat focused on improving our program, the department of criminology is now focused on improving our graduate program in measurable terms. The faculty are all focused on finding ways to continually augment our program in order to elevate our program to the level that it should maintain throughout the coming years.