

Graduate Academic Program Assessment Plan Example

Master of Arts, Human Behavior and Social Dynamics

*This fictional assessment plan illustrates a strong assessment plan rated **Good** overall using the SHSU Meta-Assessment Rubric. Some components meet the Exemplary standard, while others intentionally reflect the Good level. The example demonstrates that a Good plan is clear, complete, aligned, and useful for continuous improvement, while also showing the additional evidence, justification, and implementation detail needed to reach Exemplary.*

NOTE: A high-quality assessment plan for an academic program should be grounded in the program's Mission.

Program Mission

The Master of Arts in Human Behavior and Social Dynamics prepares graduates to examine the complex interactions among individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. Through interdisciplinary study, students develop advanced skills in research, data analysis, social theory, program evaluation, ethical decision-making, professional communication, and evidence-based problem solving to address contemporary social challenges in public, private, nonprofit, professional, and scholarly settings.

Goal 1

Develop graduates who can conduct rigorous interdisciplinary research and apply analytical methods to understand and address complex human behavior and social dynamics.

Learning Objective 1.1

By the end of the program, students will design interdisciplinary social science research studies to address questions about human behavior and social dynamics.

Indicator 1.1 (Direct Measurement Method)

Interdisciplinary Research Proposal: During the capstone research course, graduating students will develop an original interdisciplinary research proposal addressing a contemporary issue in human behavior and social dynamics. The proposal will include a clearly defined research problem, a review of relevant scholarly literature, a theoretical framework, research questions, methodology, data collection procedures, and anticipated analytical methods.

A faculty evaluation committee will assess each proposal using a standardized Research Design Rubric that measures the student's ability to formulate a research problem, integrate interdisciplinary perspectives, design an appropriate research methodology, justify methodological decisions, and demonstrate scholarly rigor and feasibility.

Criterion 1.1

At least 90% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Research Design Rubric.

Designing rigorous interdisciplinary research is a foundational outcome of the program. A score of 3.0 indicates proficient graduate-level performance, demonstrating that students can independently develop a well-designed, methodologically sound research proposal. Because research design skills are developed progressively throughout the curriculum and reinforced in multiple courses, the program expects 90% of graduating students to achieve this level of proficiency.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 1.1

The criterion was met. Twenty-nine graduating students completed the Interdisciplinary Research Proposal during the assessment cycle. Twenty-seven students (93.1%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Research Design Rubric, exceeding the program benchmark of 90%.

Performance was strongest in the rubric dimensions evaluating problem formulation, research methodology, and study feasibility. Lower scores were observed in the integration of interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, indicating that some students could strengthen their ability to connect multiple social science perspectives to research design. Overall, the results indicate that graduates demonstrated proficiency in designing rigorous interdisciplinary research studies.

Action 1.1

Improvement Strategy: Revise instructional materials. Although the criterion was met, the findings identified an opportunity to further strengthen students' ability to integrate interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives into research design. The graduate research methods faculty will revise instructional materials in the Capstone Research course by incorporating additional interdisciplinary research examples and guided literature synthesis activities that model the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. Students will use these activities to examine how theories from different social science disciplines can be connected to a common research problem and incorporated into the conceptual framework and design of a research study.

Faculty will provide feedback on students' integration of theoretical perspectives before completion of the Interdisciplinary Research Proposal. These revisions will be implemented before the next academic year under the direction of the Program Coordinator.

Learning Objective 1.2

By the end of the program, students will analyze quantitative and qualitative data using appropriate social science research methods.

Indicator 1.2 (Direct Measurement Method)

Data Analysis Project: During the Advanced Research Methods course, graduating students will complete a comprehensive data analysis project requiring the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data related to a contemporary social issue. Students will prepare a professional analytical report that includes data preparation, analysis, interpretation of findings, and evidence-based conclusions derived from both data sources.

Faculty will evaluate each project using a standardized four-point Data Analysis Scoring Guide that assesses selection of appropriate analytical techniques, accuracy of analyses, interpretation of findings, integration of evidence into conclusions, and communication of results using accepted social science conventions.

Criterion 1.2

At least 90% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Data Analysis Scoring Guide. The ability to analyze quantitative and qualitative data is central to graduate-level social science practice.

A score of 3.0 indicates that students can accurately apply appropriate analytical techniques and draw evidence-based conclusions. Because data analysis skills are developed across the curriculum, the program expects 90% of graduating students to demonstrate proficient performance.

Criterion Status

Not Met

Findings 1.2

The criterion was not met. Thirty graduating students completed the Data Analysis Project. Twenty-five students (83.3%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Data Analysis Scoring Guide, falling below the program benchmark of 90%.

Students generally performed well in selecting appropriate analytical techniques and conducting accurate analyses. However, lower scores occurred in the scoring areas measuring interpretation of findings and integration of evidence into conclusions, suggesting that some students experienced difficulty translating analytical results into meaningful, evidence-based interpretations. Overall, the results indicate that additional instructional support is needed to strengthen students' interpretation and synthesis of research findings.

Action 1.2

Improvement Strategy: Scaffold learning through progressive assignments. Because the criterion was not met, the Advanced Research Methods course will be revised to include two scaffolded data analysis assignments and one faculty-guided workshop that emphasizes the interpretation of quantitative and qualitative findings and the integration of evidence into well-supported conclusions. Students will receive formative feedback on each assignment before completing the final Data Analysis Project. The course instructor, in consultation with the Program Coordinator, will implement these revisions before the next assessment cycle.

Goal 2

Develop graduates who can evaluate social issues, programs, and organizational practices using evidence-based reasoning to inform effective decision-making and promote meaningful social improvement.

Learning Objective 2.1

By the end of the program, students will evaluate social programs using evidence-based evaluation frameworks.

Indicator 2.1 (Direct Measurement Method)

Program Evaluation Report: During the Program Evaluation course, graduating students will complete a comprehensive evaluation of an existing public, private, or nonprofit program using an established program evaluation framework. Students will examine program goals, implementation, outcomes, and available evidence to determine overall effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

Faculty will assess each report using a standardized Program Evaluation Form that rates performance on a four-point scale in the areas of applying evaluation frameworks, analyzing program performance, interpreting evaluation evidence, identifying strengths and limitations, and developing evidence-based conclusions.

Criterion 2.1

At least 85% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Program Evaluation Form. Program evaluation requires students to integrate research methods, analytical reasoning, and professional judgment within authentic organizational contexts.

Because this competency requires the synthesis of multiple advanced skills, the program established a benchmark of 85% to reflect a rigorous yet attainable expectation for graduating students.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 2.1

The criterion was met. Twenty-eight graduating students completed the Program Evaluation Report. Twenty-four students (85.7%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Program Evaluation Form, exceeding the established benchmark of 85%.

Students achieved the highest scores in the areas of the evaluation form assessing the application of evaluation frameworks and the analysis of program effectiveness. Lower performance was observed in interpreting evaluation evidence and identifying meaningful program strengths and limitations, indicating that some students experienced difficulty synthesizing evaluation findings into a comprehensive assessment of overall program performance. Overall, the findings indicate that graduates demonstrated proficiency in applying evidence-based program evaluation practices.

Action 2.1

Improvement Strategy: Structured peer review. Although the criterion was met, the findings identified an opportunity to strengthen students' ability to interpret evaluation evidence and identify meaningful program strengths and limitations. Faculty will incorporate a structured peer-review activity into the Program Evaluation course in which students review draft evaluation reports using the Program Evaluation Form to assess the interpretation of evidence, identification of program strengths and limitations, and overall evaluation conclusions before submitting their final reports. Students will revise their reports based on peer and instructor feedback to strengthen their evaluation skills. The course instructor will implement this revision during the next course offering.

Learning Objective 2.2

By the end of the program, students will formulate evidence-based recommendations that address complex social issues.

Indicator 2.2 (Direct Measurement Method)

Policy Recommendation Brief: During the applied social policy seminar, graduating students will prepare a professional policy recommendation brief addressing a contemporary social issue affecting individuals, organizations, or communities. The brief will synthesize scholarly literature, analyze relevant evidence, evaluate alternative approaches, and present well-supported recommendations for decision-makers.

Faculty will evaluate each brief using a standardized Policy Recommendation Rubric that measures the student's ability to synthesize evidence, evaluate policy alternatives, formulate evidence-based recommendations, justify proposed actions, and communicate recommendations in a clear and professional format.

Criterion 2.2

At least 90% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Policy Recommendation Rubric.

Developing evidence-based recommendations is a primary expectation of graduates entering leadership, research, and policy-related professions. A score of 3.0 demonstrates that students can formulate well-supported recommendations using credible evidence and sound reasoning. Given the emphasis placed on applied problem solving throughout the curriculum, the program expects 90% of graduating students to achieve this level of proficiency.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 2.2

The criterion was met. Twenty-nine graduating students completed the Policy Recommendation Brief. Twenty-seven students (93.1%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Policy Recommendation Rubric, exceeding the program benchmark of 90%.

Students demonstrated consistently strong performance in synthesizing scholarly evidence, evaluating policy alternatives, and formulating evidence-based recommendations. Slightly lower scores were observed in the justification of implementation strategies; however, these differences did not affect the overall achievement of the criterion. Overall, the results indicate that graduates effectively formulated professional policy recommendations supported by appropriate evidence and analysis.

Action 2.2

Improvement Strategy: Authentic policy simulation. Although the criterion was met, the findings identified an opportunity to strengthen students' ability to justify implementation strategies within policy recommendations. The Applied Social Policy Seminar will incorporate a policy simulation requiring students to present evidence-based recommendations to a mock panel representing government, nonprofit, and community stakeholders. Students will receive instructor feedback on the feasibility and justification of their recommendations before submitting the final Policy Recommendation Brief. The course instructor will implement this activity before the next academic year.

Goal 3

Develop graduates who can apply social science knowledge ethically and communicate effectively with diverse audiences to address contemporary challenges in communities and organizations.

Learning Objective 3.1

By the end of the program, students will apply ethical principles when making professional decisions in social science contexts.

Indicator 3.1 (Direct Measurement Method)

Ethical Decision-Making Case Analysis: During the Professional Ethics Seminar, graduating students will complete a written analysis of a complex ethical case involving human behavior, organizational practice, or community-based decision-making. Students will identify ethical issues, evaluate alternative courses of action, apply appropriate ethical principles, and justify their recommended decisions using professional standards and supporting evidence.

Faculty will evaluate each analysis using a standardized Ethical Decision-Making Rating Form with a four-point performance scale assessing identification of ethical issues, application of ethical principles, justification of decisions, consideration of stakeholder perspectives, and selection of ethically appropriate actions.

Criterion 3.1

At least 90% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Ethical Decision-Making Rating Form.

Ethical decision-making is a fundamental expectation of professional practice in the social sciences and is reinforced throughout the curriculum. A score of 3.0 indicates that students consistently apply ethical principles when analyzing professional dilemmas and making informed decisions. Because ethical competence is essential for responsible professional practice, the program expects 90% of graduating students to demonstrate proficient performance.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 3.1

The criterion was met. Thirty graduating students completed the Ethical Decision-Making Case Analysis. Twenty-eight students (93.3%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Ethical Decision-Making Rating Form, exceeding the program benchmark of 90%.

Students earned the highest scores in the areas assessing identification of ethical issues and application of professional ethical principles to complex situations. Comparatively lower scores were observed in considering multiple stakeholder perspectives, although most students still demonstrated proficient ethical reasoning. Overall, the results indicate that graduates consistently applied ethical principles when making professional decisions in social science contexts.

Action 3.1

Improvement Strategy: Case-based learning. Although the criterion was met, the findings suggested that students would benefit from additional opportunities to consider multiple stakeholder perspectives when making ethical decisions. The Professional Ethics Seminar will expand its use of complex case studies involving competing stakeholder interests and incorporate small-group discussions followed by individual written reflections prior to the final Ethical

Decision-Making Case Analysis. These activities will provide additional opportunities for students to evaluate competing perspectives before completing the summative assessment. The course instructor will implement these revisions before the next assessment cycle.

Learning Objective 3.2

By the end of the program, students will communicate social science findings to professional and public audiences.

Indicator 3.2 (Direct Measurement Method)

Professional Research Presentation: During the graduate capstone seminar, graduating students will deliver a professional presentation to an audience of faculty, peers, and community stakeholders that communicates the results of an original research study or program evaluation project. Students will present the purpose of the study, methodology, findings, implications, and recommendations while responding to audience questions.

Faculty will evaluate each presentation using a standardized Communication Rubric that measures the student's ability to organize information logically, communicate complex concepts clearly, support conclusions with evidence, tailor communication to diverse audiences, demonstrate professional presentation skills, and respond effectively to questions.

Criterion 3.2

At least 85% of graduating students will earn an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Communication Rubric.

Communicating research findings to diverse audiences is an important graduate competency requiring both content expertise and effective presentation skills. A score of 3.0 reflects clear, organized, and professional communication supported by appropriate evidence. Because presentation performance can vary across authentic speaking contexts, the program established a benchmark of 85%, representing a high yet realistic expectation for graduating students.

Criterion Status

Not Met

Findings 3.2

The criterion was not met. Twenty-nine graduating students delivered the Professional Research Presentation. Twenty-four students (82.8%) earned an overall score of 3.0 or higher on the four-point Communication Rubric, falling short of the program benchmark of 85%.

Students generally organized information effectively and supported conclusions with appropriate evidence. Lower scores occurred in the rubric dimensions evaluating adaptation of communication for diverse audiences and responses to audience questions, indicating that some students were less effective when communicating complex information to non-specialist audiences. Overall, the results suggest that additional opportunities to practice professional presentations in authentic settings would strengthen students' communication skills before graduation.

Action 3.2

Improvement Strategy: Repeated authentic practice with formative feedback. Because the criterion was not met, the Graduate Capstone Seminar will be revised to include two graded presentations prior to the final capstone presentation. One presentation will target an academic audience, while the second will require students to communicate the same research findings to a community audience. Faculty will provide structured feedback using the Communication Rubric following each presentation to strengthen students' ability to adapt communication for diverse audiences and respond effectively to audience questions before completing the final presentation. The Program Coordinator and graduate faculty will implement these revisions before the next assessment cycle.

Goal 4

Prepare graduates to apply their knowledge and skills in professional settings and contribute to scholarly discourse within the social sciences.

Learning Objective 4.1

By the end of the program, students will apply social science knowledge during a supervised practicum experience.

Indicator 4.1 (Direct Measurement Method)

Practicum Performance Evaluation: During a supervised practicum experience, students will apply social science knowledge while completing professional responsibilities in an approved public, private, or nonprofit organization. At the conclusion of the practicum, the site supervisor will complete a standardized Practicum Performance Evaluation Form assessing the student's application of relevant social science concepts and theories to professional tasks, situations, and decision-making. Performance will be rated using established categories of *Exceeds Expectations*, *Meets Expectations*, *Approaches Expectations*, or *Does Not Meet Expectations*.

Criterion 4.1

At least 90% of students completing the practicum will receive an overall rating of Meets Expectations or higher on the Practicum Performance Evaluation Form. The practicum provides an opportunity for students to apply social science knowledge in an authentic professional setting. A rating of Meets Expectations indicates that students can appropriately apply relevant social science concepts and theories to professional tasks, situations, and decision-making. Because the practicum occurs near the completion of the graduate program, the program expects 90% of students to meet or exceed this level of performance.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 4.1

The criterion was met. Twenty-eight students completed the supervised practicum during the assessment cycle. Twenty-six students (92.9%) received an overall rating of Meets Expectations or higher on the Practicum Performance Evaluation Form, exceeding the program benchmark of 90%.

Site supervisors generally reported that students effectively applied relevant social science concepts and theories to professional tasks and situations. Lower performance was observed in applying disciplinary knowledge to unfamiliar or complex workplace situations. Overall, the results indicate that students demonstrated proficiency in applying social science knowledge during the practicum experience.

Action 4.1

Improvement Strategy: Guided practicum reflection. Although the criterion was met, the findings identified an opportunity to strengthen students' ability to apply social science knowledge to unfamiliar or complex professional situations. Students completing the practicum will participate in two faculty-guided reflection activities in which they examine challenging situations encountered during the practicum and explain how relevant social science concepts or theories can be applied. The Practicum Coordinator will implement these activities during the next practicum cycle.

Learning Objective 4.2

By the end of the program, students will produce scholarly manuscripts that meet disciplinary standards for publication in peer-reviewed social science journals.

Indicator 4.2 (Direct Measurement Method)

Scholarly Manuscript Faculty Review: During the Graduate Research Seminar, students will prepare a scholarly manuscript based on original research completed during the program. The manuscript will follow the conventions of an appropriate peer-reviewed social science journal and include the major components expected for scholarly publication.

A faculty review panel will evaluate each manuscript according to established disciplinary standards, including the quality of the scholarly argument, integration of relevant literature, presentation and interpretation of evidence, contribution to the field, organization, and adherence to disciplinary writing and publication conventions. Following the review, manuscripts will be classified as Ready for Submission, Ready for Submission with Minor Revisions, Requires Substantial Revision, or Not Ready for Submission.

Criterion 4.2

At least 85% of students completing the Scholarly Manuscript Faculty Review will have their manuscripts classified as Ready for Submission or Ready for Submission with Minor Revisions.

Producing scholarship appropriate for peer-reviewed publication requires students to integrate advanced research, analytical, and scholarly writing skills. These classifications indicate that the manuscript substantially meets disciplinary expectations for scholarly publication without requiring major revisions. Because producing publication-quality scholarship represents an advanced graduate-level competency, the program established a benchmark of 85% as a rigorous yet attainable expectation.

Criterion Status

Not Met

Findings 4.2

The criterion was not met. Twenty-nine students completed the Scholarly Manuscript Faculty Review. Twenty-three students (79.3%) had manuscripts classified as Ready for Submission or Ready for Submission with Minor Revisions, falling below the program benchmark of 85%.

Faculty reviewers identified strengths in the organization of manuscripts and integration of relevant scholarly literature. Lower performance was observed in the interpretation of evidence and articulation of the manuscript's contribution to the field, with several manuscripts requiring substantial revision in these areas. Overall, the results indicate that additional support is needed to strengthen students' ability to produce manuscripts that meet disciplinary standards for scholarly publication.

Action 4.2

Improvement Strategy: Scaffolded manuscript development. Because the criterion was not met, the Graduate Research Seminar will be revised to provide additional support for scholarly manuscript preparation. Students will complete two structured manuscript-development activities focused on interpreting research evidence and articulating the contribution of their research to the field. Graduate faculty will provide formative feedback on these activities before students submit their manuscripts for the Scholarly Manuscript Faculty Review. The Graduate Research Seminar instructor will implement these revisions during the next academic year.

Learning Objective 4.3

By the end of the program, students will construct a scholarly conference proposal that meets disciplinary standards for professional or academic conference submission.

Indicator 4.3 (Direct Measurement Method)

Scholarly Conference Proposal: During the Graduate Research Seminar, students will prepare a scholarly conference proposal based on original research completed during the program. The proposal will follow the submission requirements of an appropriate professional or academic conference and include the major components expected for scholarly conference consideration.

Graduate faculty will evaluate each proposal using a standardized Conference Proposal Scoring Guide that assigns points for the significance of the scholarly topic, clarity of purpose, presentation of relevant evidence, contribution to the field, organization, and adherence to conference submission requirements. The total score will indicate whether the proposal meets established standards for conference submission.

Criterion 4.3

At least 85% of students completing the Scholarly Conference Proposal will earn a score of 80 or higher on the 100-point Conference Proposal Scoring Guide.

Preparing a conference proposal requires students to present scholarly work clearly and concisely while meeting established disciplinary and conference submission expectations. A score of 80 indicates that the proposal meets the program's established standards for conference submission. Because constructing a submission-ready conference proposal represents an advanced graduate

level competency, the program expects at least 85% of students to achieve this level of performance.

Criterion Status

Met

Findings 4.3

The criterion was met. Thirty students completed the Scholarly Conference Proposal. Twenty-seven students (90.0%) earned a score of 80 or higher on the 100-point Conference Proposal Scoring Guide, exceeding the program benchmark of 85%.

Students generally performed well in clearly presenting the purpose and significance of their proposed scholarly work and adhering to conference submission requirements. Lower scores were observed in communicating the contribution of the proposed work to the field. Overall, the results indicate that students demonstrated proficiency in constructing scholarly conference proposals that meet established standards for conference submission.

Action 4.3

Improvement Strategy: Conference proposal workshop. Although the criterion was met, the findings identified an opportunity to strengthen students' ability to communicate the contribution of their scholarly work to the field. The Graduate Research Seminar will incorporate a faculty-guided conference proposal workshop in which students review examples of successful proposals and revise the section of their own proposal addressing the significance and contribution of their work. The course instructor will implement the workshop before students complete the final Scholarly Conference Proposal.

Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify)

During the next assessment cycle, the graduate faculty will strengthen student learning through targeted curricular and instructional improvements across the program. Faculty will revise course materials and incorporate additional instructional activities to reinforce interdisciplinary research, data analysis, program evaluation, ethical decision-making, and professional communication. Additional opportunities for formative feedback will be incorporated into selected courses to provide students with guidance before completion of major assessments.

The program will also introduce a structured peer-review process in the Program Evaluation course, incorporate a policy simulation into the Applied Social Policy Seminar, expand case-based learning activities in the Professional Ethics Seminar, and provide students with multiple opportunities to practice professional presentations in the Graduate Capstone Seminar.

The Program Coordinator and graduate faculty will oversee implementation of these improvements during the next assessment cycle and review assessment results to determine areas requiring continued attention.

Update to the Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement

The program implemented the majority of the planned improvements during the current assessment cycle. Faculty revised course materials, incorporated additional instructional activities, expanded opportunities for formative feedback, and implemented the planned peer-review process, policy simulation, case-based learning activities, and multiple presentation exercises.

Assessment results indicate that these improvements contributed to stronger student performance in several areas, with multiple learning objectives meeting or exceeding the established performance criteria. Faculty also observed improvements in student learning and greater consistency in assessment practices across the program.

Although the previous improvement efforts were beneficial, the current assessment results identified opportunities for continued improvement. Students would benefit from additional support in interpreting research findings, integrating evidence into conclusions, adapting professional communication for diverse audiences, applying social science knowledge in complex professional situations, and preparing scholarly work for publication and conference submission.

Based on these results, the program concluded that the previous Plan for Continuous Improvement was generally effective. The program developed new and revised actions to address the remaining areas identified through assessment and to strengthen students' professional application and scholarly engagement.

New Plan for Continuous Improvement

Based on the findings from the current assessment cycle and the evaluation of the previous Plan for Continuous Improvement, the graduate faculty developed a coordinated Plan for Continuous Improvement to strengthen research competency, analytical reasoning, evidence-based decision-making, ethical professional practice, communication skills, professional application, and scholarly engagement.

To address the opportunities identified through assessment, faculty will revise instructional materials, expand scaffolded learning activities, incorporate structured peer-review opportunities, implement authentic policy simulation experiences, increase the use of case-based learning and reflective activities, and provide additional opportunities for students to practice professional presentations with formative feedback. Collectively, these improvements are intended to strengthen students' research, evaluation, ethical reasoning, problem-solving, and communication competencies.

The program will also strengthen students' professional and scholarly preparation by incorporating faculty-guided reflection into the practicum experience, providing scaffolded support for scholarly manuscript development, and introducing a conference proposal workshop. These improvements will provide additional support for applying social science knowledge in complex professional situations and preparing scholarly work that meets disciplinary expectations for publication and conference submission.

As a new initiative, the graduate faculty will establish an annual Graduate Scholarship and Professional Development Forum to provide students with opportunities to share practicum experiences, discuss scholarly work in progress, and learn about professional and scholarly engagement from faculty and invited practitioners.

The Program Coordinator and graduate faculty will implement these improvements during the next assessment cycle to strengthen student learning and address the opportunities for improvement identified through assessment.