

ASSESSMENT AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL
Point Loma Nazarene University
Spring, 2007

The following summary demonstrates assessment efforts at Point Loma Nazarene University in academic programs at the graduate level.

Master of Arts/Master of Science (General Biology)

Although the M.A./M.S. program in General Biology has yet to graduate candidates for the degree, the program director and faculty have designed assessment activities. The graduate program in biology has 3 main objectives which require various assessment approaches.

First, students will improve in their biology content knowledge as a result of the program. This will be assessed by comparing each student's score on the Major Field Test in biology, which they will take as part of the application process, with their score on the same exam when they finish the program.

Second, students will gain pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in biology. This will be assessed differently depending on whether the student chooses the M.A. or M.S. option. At completion of the program, M.A. students will choose from a list of 6 biology topics, and will write a document that includes a list of the likely conceptual difficulties that middle and high school students would encounter when learning the topic, as well as a plan for instructional interventions that would improve learning of the topic. For M.S. students, the thesis research will serve as a display of understanding in this area.

Third, students will be able to articulate and reflect on the challenges of teaching topics at the intersection of science and faith. This aspect of the program will be assessed by examination of a collection of reflective responses written by each student during each of the biology content courses. These papers will be assigned as part of the curriculum for each of the summer courses, and will ask the students to reflect on how they would handle topics such as stem cell research and evolutionary theory in the classroom in a manner that is scientifically accurate, yet within a framework that is sensitive to and supportive of students from a variety of backgrounds.

Master of Arts (Education)

Robust Effectiveness Efforts. Each credential and degree program in the School of Education uses research-based, developmental rubrics (4 performance levels) of professional practice. These rubrics are used to monitor the comprehensive transformation of a candidate along the developmental continuum from the beginning of the program to the end and through five years of follow-up study for selected alumni. These rubrics are used in course work, clinical practice assignments, and in the culminating performance assessment requiring the deep and integrated understanding and application of the rubrics (with a documented impact on student learning in the case of teacher candidates). These rubrics are used as the anchor as candidates and their site evaluators/coaches continue documenting the impact of the PLNU program in follow-up studies.

Measurement and Improvement of Candidate Learning and Student Learning. At entry into a clinical practice phase, candidates and university supervisors collaboratively develop a beginning performance profile strengths and focus areas of candidates for each element of each of Teacher Performance Expectations or California Standards for the Teaching Profession. This profile is based on initial observations and conferencing, review of previous fieldwork data, teacher

performance assessment data, and evidence of knowledge, skills, and dispositions from coursework. An induction (professional development) plan is established based on this profile. The prioritized focus areas are systematically and explicitly addressed throughout the clinical practice experience. The 2007-2008 plan will be to have preliminary teaching completers carry their professional development plan forward to their induction/MA program and beyond. Candidates are required to document the impact of their teaching on student learning with a specific focus on targeted English learners and students with special needs.

Embedding excellence in writing, critical thinking, appreciation of diversity and commitment to service. WRITING: MA Teaching and Learning candidates who seek the applied action research option for their in-depth study are required to follow an explicit research format. Rubrics and exemplars are shared with candidates and step by step coaching/formative feedback is provided by faculty throughout the research writing process. CRITICAL THINKING: The California Teacher Performance Assessment is a required component of all preliminary teaching credential programs at PLNU. Each of the four tasks in this state licensure assessment system requires candidates to demonstrate an ability to integrate and apply their knowledge, skills, and dispositions gained from all coursework and clinical practice, to demonstrate a deliberate impact on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the most challenging students in their classrooms and to analyze and reflect on this impact and how they will specifically carry their new insights forward in their teaching. DIVERSITY: Diversity is a required component of every credential and advanced degree program in the School of Education. Teachers, counselors, and aspiring administrators are required to demonstrate evidence of a deepening and applied knowledge of the diverse student populations they serve: demographics and cultural context. They are required to examine their own beliefs, values, and biases as well as the overt and covert institutional biases in schools. They are required to demonstrate their ability to offer an equitable learning environment to ALL students and use learning and communication styles that are culturally responsive to both students and parents. COMMITMENT TO SERVICE: As we conduct exit interviews in our various credential and degree programs, we have graduates reflect on their transformation in character and calling by speaking to the School of Education's Dispositions of Noble Character. Candidates will often mention their confirmed calling and ministry to serve as an educator who impacts student lives. More frequently now, candidates have described their calling to serve English learners or students with special needs in the most challenging schools (this is the School of Education's defined niche). They describe their emerging instructional philosophy as they traversed through their program, wrestling with issues of self-awareness and integrity of heart, spirit, and mind.

Master of Arts (Religion)

The Master of Arts in Religion program utilizes the following in assessment: three specific intended educational outcomes, including writing clearly and critically about theological issues and arguments, demonstrating a level of knowledge and understanding appropriate to a master's degree-level candidate of the principal ideas and theories in the history of theology, and mastery of contemporary methods of biblical study. The means of assessment include a thesis, a two-hour oral examination, and a portfolio of original writing and examinations from graduate courses in Bible. The degree program also specifies criteria for success, including percentage rates of success in the thesis requirement, the oral examination, and master norms be based on the reviewers' assessment of the level of mastery typically expected of graduate students in American universities.

Master of Business Administration

The Fermanian School of Business has been measuring and assessing educational effectiveness since the inception of the Master of Business program in 2001. The faculty are active participants in ACBSP accreditation workshops and conferences where learning outcome standards are continuously updated based on the Malcolm Baldrige framework for continuous improvement.

The faculty has initiated several improvements based on our assessment of educational effectiveness. For example, the faculty added a series of Business Basics courses for students entering the MBA program without prior business courses or adequate background in the Common Professional Competencies. In addition, the faculty has standardized the requirements for Masters thesis/project that requires an extensive research project including data collection and analysis, critical thinking and writing, and a rigorous oral defense.

In addition to the course work objectives outlined in syllabi, the Fermanian School of Business assesses educational effectiveness through the following elements:

ETS - Major Field Test. Students are required to take the national ETS Major Field Test for MBA. This is a three hour test taken during the last semester Capstone course. This data has been tracked since the first graduating class and is used to develop curriculum.

Master Thesis/Project (Bus 695). MBA students are required to write a masters thesis/project. The research begins in the Quantitative analysis and Business Statistics course and ends with a final oral defense. All students write an extensive manuscript which includes their primary research, analysis, and implications. "The applied research project (Bus 695) is the most important component of your Fermanian School of Business graduate program. It is not only a significant requirement in order to complete the project, but also the most tangible evidence of the quality of your scholarship and of the Fermanian School of Business program. It can be the key to furthering your professional career as well. Such an opportunity deserves, and requires, a considerable commitment of your time and energy."

Student Satisfaction Survey. In July 2006, the Fermanian School initiated a student satisfaction survey of 100 questions covering the student's entire School of Business experience. The survey includes self-reporting on increased knowledge, skills, improved writing, critical thinking skills, etc. The School of Business will continue to use this instrument to track over time the student's perceived effectiveness of the MBA experience.

Capstone course (Bus 675). The School of Business offers a capstone course that includes a computer simulation (Capstone Simulation) followed by an individual simulation (CompXM). In both simulations the students compete with other MBA programs and are ranked nationally. The capstone course consists of complex case analysis accompanied by computer simulation which provides excellent assessment of the MBA program.

Integrative course (Bus 611). This course is the cornerstone of the MBA experience and is taught in a seminar format which brings in executives who have lead with integrity in their public and private life by integrating their faith and profession. The course challenges the MBA professional to integrate their academic knowledge, core values, and professional experience. It emphasizes the challenges executives face in balancing the needs of customers, community, shareholders, employees, and other stakeholders with Biblical, ethical, and legal considerations. Students are required to write reflective papers including critical analysis of key societal issues facing business professionals.

Master of Ministry

In conducting the most recent assessment of the Master of Ministry program I followed the learning outcomes and assessment tools given to me by the Dean of the School of Theology and Christian Ministry. At the time I assumed responsibility for the Master of Ministry program, there were only three active students taking courses in San Diego. Also, most of the students enrolled at that time were taking courses in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and a majority of those receiving the Master of Ministry degree were from New Mexico. I actually organized a focus group of recent Master of Ministry graduates in Albuquerque and met with them for an entire evening to assess

the program's effectiveness, based upon the existing learning outcomes and criteria established by the School of Theology.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: There are four learning outcomes articulated by the SOTCM for the Master of Ministry program:

1. Students will exhibit increased confidence and skills in leadership of the local congregation. (*Criteria: Graduates can articulate ways they have improved their practice in ministry and leadership.*)
2. Students will understand the role of the Christian tradition as a resource for faithful pastoral ministry today. (*Criteria: Graduates can discuss ministry implications from scripture and various streams of the Christian tradition.*)
3. Students will exhibit increased contextual awareness of ministry assignment. (*Criteria: Graduates can articulate new understandings of the demographics and culture of their local congregation and neighboring communities.*)
4. Students should exhibit awareness of and participate in wider reading resources for continuing ministerial education and performance. (*Criteria: Graduates regularly access a wide variety of journals, books, conferences, and internet resources in the pursuit of lifelong learning.*)

FINDINGS: The feedback session with Albuquerque graduates produced a great deal of data and information (including recommendations for the future). Here are a few summary statements from my notes.

1. Students reported new balance in their life and ministry, new passion for personal discipleship, new skills in goal-setting and leadership, improved relationships with colleagues and professors and a reduced sense of isolation in ministry.
2. Students reported fresh understandings of the mission of the Church and a deepened appreciation for the sacraments. They repeatedly commented on changed perspectives due to exposure to aspects of the Christian tradition which they had not previously explored.
3. Focus group participants indicated that the program helped them to more clearly understand the issues of post-modernity and their immediate ministry demographics. They particularly felt that the "capstone" special studies project assisted them in meeting this objective.
4. In general, graduates had developed a "broader range" of resources helpful for sermon preparation and program development as a direct result of the program.

ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC SKILLS:

Writing skills--Focus group participants described observable improvement in their writing skills, for instance:

AG: *"I found it helpful to take the reading and condense it into a summary reflection. Writing skills and critical thinking skills have greatly improved."*

MW: *"My writing skills probably tripled and now I see that improvement in all of my writing."*

OTHERS: *"I agree, this was also true for me."*

Critical thinking--Graduates also indicated that their ability to "think theologically" about the practice of ministry had deepened as a result of the program. Some suggested that prior to the

program they were very reluctant to read "outside" of their tradition but now feel equipped to read more widely and with a "seasoned" discernment, for instance:

MW: *"I learned how to critically think about diverse viewpoints and sort out that which is substantive."*

KE: *"The history of the church and its past has helped me to understand 'where' I am today and where I need to be going in the future."*

MW: *"I have always read widely but I have used a lot of the resources from the M.Min. courses and passed them on to other pastors in my community. I use the Internet a lot more now and I bought a new set of commentaries."*

KE: *"I used to read more narrowly (what I needed) but now I read more diverse material."*

AG: *"I find myself doing the same thing (reading more diverse material)."*

MW: *"I'm more attracted to "good writing" now than I was before."*

JS: *"I'm not reading a lot of new things but I am continually referring to things I read in the program."*

MW: *"Now (having completed the program) I'm not intimidated by reading outside of my tradition (conservative, evangelical) and personal comfort zone."*

I realize that this is "self-reported" data but I believe that these statements are significant in light of the fact that they were freely offered and not "solicited" by the focus group facilitator. It might be helpful in the future to preserve a "file" of written papers for each student and then these could be reviewed and evaluated for improved writing capacity.

Appreciation for diversity--Several of the Master of Ministry courses include major sections on ethnic diversity and changing population demographics. In light of these realities, students are encouraged to develop and implement effective missional strategies for such a diverse ministry context. A review of the required reading would reflect this emphasis on diversity.

Commitment to service--It seems to me that the Master of Ministry student population "incarnates" a commitment to service and that this value is essentially "indigenous" to their vocation and call.

SOME CHANGES: Taking seriously the feedback from Master of Ministry graduates we have made several changes in the program.

1. More attention is being given to "linking" theological and biblical material to the practice of ministry in the post-course assignment.
2. The addition of a final "capstone" project prior to program completion is designed to further relate the Master of Ministry curriculum to local and contextual issues.
3. An orientation component has been added to introduce students to library and internet resources available to them through the university.
4. Greater intentionality is being expressed in the creation of instructional teams that represent different streams of the Christian tradition.

Master of Science in Nursing

For the past five years the MSN program has used several measures in our deepening and extending our assessment efforts including:

Student performance is reviewed yearly through the development of a portfolio, which after self-evaluation by the student is reviewed by faculty. A portfolio format was chosen as an indicator of student progress toward meeting competencies and outcomes and is consistent with the PLNU MSN and BSN program evaluations and external accreditation reviews.

A completed Project or Thesis demonstrates a final summative evaluation of all students. The classes GNSG 601, 604, and Capstone Seminar are designed to prepare students to complete the P/T of their choice. All P/T require a nursing faculty committee comprised of one faculty person as the chair, and an additional faculty person to form the committee. An additional faculty member or community member prepared at or above the master's level with clinical expertise in the area of the P/T may be added. Guidelines are available in the *MSN Student Handbook* for the development of this scholarly work. Dissemination of this summative work is required through a presentation.

Measures to assess improved student learning include the following:

In each core course students write a scholarly paper and there are examinations in several of the graduate courses throughout the semester. Students in the Advanced Health Assessment course also have to show knowledge of advanced Health assessment techniques with faculty and clinical preceptors. Each clinical course also has faculty and clinical preceptors complete summative evaluations at the completion of the courses. An evaluation tool developed for portfolio evaluation is being refined. Expected competencies at the course level are reviewed on a yearly rotational basis through an assessment process, examining course content related to student competencies. All MSN students are evaluated on their attainment of 5 core competencies:

- CRITICAL THINKING
- THERAPEUTIC NURSING INTERVENTIONS
- COMMUNICATION
- SERVICE
- SPIRITUALITY

A yearly Scholarly Day in the spring semester was initiated with each student being required to complete portfolios and poster presentations of student learning in a session open to the university community.

Students also are graded on their ability to function as advanced practice nurses by faculty and preceptors in clinical agencies. Students must demonstrate ability to teach didactic and clinical courses with the BSN students or with patients at a clinical agency depending on their clinical or education focus.

Students must complete 340-500 clinical hours for completion of program requirements based on their role function as a CNS or as a nurse Educator working in academic settings. Scholarly work represented by a Project/Thesis (P/T) demonstrates the student's ability to practice at an advanced practice level.

All nursing course syllabi include course competencies, methods of evaluation and grading policies of students. Grading policies are consistent with the School of Nursing BSN and the current *Graduate Catalog*. Grading is based on mathematical calculation and is not negotiated. Grades are final when issued.

Clinical evaluations are both formative and summative, based on the clinical competencies, and completed on all students during the clinical courses. Students are given opportunity to self-evaluate against all competencies for the clinical experience on the same form as the preceptor's evaluation of the student performance. Areas for narrative comment for both student and preceptor are available regarding the student strengths and areas of growth/future goals. The student and preceptor date and sign the form and this is returned to the faculty of record for review. Faculty members complete an assessment form for each student after a clinical site visit is done. This form allows the faculty to provide a narrative comment under each of the curriculum outcomes based on their observation of the clinical experience. Clinical grades are represented as credit (CR) and no credit (NC), consistent with the undergraduate grading criteria for courses that count toward a student's total number of units but have no grade-point value and no effect on the grade-point average. The completed clinical evaluation forms for each student are stored in the student's file.

In the MSN program we embed excellence in writing, critical thinking, appreciation of diversity, and commitment to service in graduate studies in the following ways

Each student participates in a capstone course where they evidence learning through development of an Evidence-Based project scholarly paper evidencing critical thinking. In this paper they identify a clinical situation, evaluate based on the literature and make recommendations based on the outcome of their research.

Each student is required to be engaged in the writing of a thesis/project assisted by 2 faculty members who assess and advise regarding the writing of this paper over their years of study at PLNU. This year the MSN committee has initiated a one-day writing seminar by a faculty member from the Department of Literature, Journalism, and Modern Languages for all entering MSN students. The class will be held as the first meeting of the cohort. This is initiated to assist in the evaluation of student needs in the areas of writing skills by both faculty and the student as they begin the MSN program.

To further enhance learning experiences related to cultural diversity, the School of Nursing has actively sought faculty who have had experience with disadvantaged populations. Faculty has worked extensively with migrant farm workers, an inner city clinic in Washington, D.C., homeless men with AIDS, and vulnerable populations in Detroit Metro areas. The School of Nursing has a long history of taking nursing students on health care mission trips once or twice a year to a large variety of countries; the most recent being with faculty members.

Graduate students along with undergraduate nursing students participate in clinicals in disadvantaged areas of the San Diego area such as homeless shelters, community events serving international clients, as well as interstate and International experiences. Graduate students supervise undergraduate students in monthly Blood Pressure screenings at the Mid-City Church of the Nazarene where they provide free services to disadvantaged parishioners and the community.

This past December MSN students participated in an outreach to 9th Ward neighborhoods in New Orleans in assessment and outreach activities accompanied by faculty, undergraduate students and the President of PLNU. Also, in the past 2 years, students gained cultural experiences in clinicals in Mexico and Indonesia working with CNS preceptors. The PLNU School of nursing actively attempts to provide meaningful clinical experiences and well as lectures by health care professionals working with vulnerable populations.