

Annual Key Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements Academic Year 2009-2010

National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) Doctor of Philosophy Program in Social Work

Assessment Measures

The National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) uses the following measures to assess student learning outcomes:

- Progression through the program
- Grades, course evaluations, and enrollment totals for History and Philosophy of Social Work (SSS 940) and the introductory Research Methods course (SSS 950)
- Comprehensive examination pass rates
- Alumni Survey (every 5 years)

Assessment Findings

Progression through the program

In the 2009-10 academic year, 14 PhD students were admitted. Of these, seven were full time, five were part time, and two were non-degree. Nine doctoral candidates completed the program (one was an October 2010 graduate).

Grades and Course Evaluations for the Gateway Course

History and Philosophy in Social Work Knowledge Building (SSS 940) is the gateway course for the doctoral program. All new students – full-time, part-time, and non-degree – take this course in the fall semester of their first year. Final grades for the 2009-10 year group were four grades of A, four A-, two B+, one B, two C, and one F. A full-time student received a grade of C, met with a review committee, as required by NCSSS policy, and was counseled to drop back to part time status. The other student who received a grade of C was non-degree, so the student was not allowed to continue. One student was accused of plagiarism, met with a review committee which recommended a grade of F in the course, as required by university policy.

There was a 92.3% response rate for course evaluations for this gateway course. Students' mean score for "relevance of the course" on a 5 point scale was 4.75. "Knowledge and Skill of the Instructor" was rated 4.92, and "overall effectiveness of the instructor" was rated at 4.75. These evaluations indicate both satisfaction with the course and understanding of its relevance to the doctoral program.

Full and part time students take Research Methods (SSS 950) in the spring semester of their first year. Final grades for 2009-10 year were 5 grades of A, 4 of A-, and two C's. Those who received grades of C met with review committees and recommendations were made for adjustment of their programs.

There was a 100% response rate for course evaluations for this course. Students' mean score for "relevance of the course" on a 5 point scale was 5.0. "Knowledge and Skill of the Instructor" was rated 4.73, and "overall effectiveness of the instructor" was rated at 4.73.

These evaluations indicate both satisfaction with the course and understanding of its relevance to the doctoral program.

Comprehensive Examination Outcome

Program policy requires that a student must pass the comprehensive before submitting a proposal for the dissertation. The exam may be failed and retaken only once. A second fail results in dismissal from the program. Prior to the fall of 2006, students could receive a grade of pass or fail. The Doctoral Program Committee found that allowing a third option of “marginal” provided a finer measure of performance on the exam. Students receiving a grade of marginal on the written exam have the opportunity to take an oral exam in which they have a different medium in which to demonstrate that they understand the material. Students who take oral may pass (Marginal/Pass) or fail (Marginal/Fail) the oral and thus the entire comprehensive exam. A student who fails the oral must retake the written exam the following semester.

During the fall semester of 2009, one student took the comprehensive exam and passed. This student had failed the previous spring. In the Spring of 2010, seven students took the comprehensive exam. Three passed the exam, three received grades of “marginal,” took an oral and ultimately passed. One student failed and will retake in the fall of 2010.

	Pass	Marginal/Pass	Marginal/Fail	Fail
Fall 2009	1			
Spring 2010	3	3		1

Alumni Survey

In 2008, the Doctoral Program Committee conducted a survey of a 10-year cohort of graduates. Among other issues, the survey explored progression through the program, degree of support alumni felt during they preparation, how well the program prepared them for their post PhD career. This survey is generated every five years to capture the views of a cohort of the most recent graduates. Thus, it will be repeated in 2013

Curricular Improvements

In response to course evaluations, alumni comments, student forums, and the ongoing assessment of the Doctoral Program Committee, the Doctoral Program proposed and the Faculty approved a revised curriculum that was launched in the Fall of 2009. This new curriculum integrates those with clinical and those with macro interests throughout the required curriculum. Both advanced quantitative and advanced qualitative courses are now required. The integrative seminar has been broadened to be relevant to those of both clinical and macro interests. In the fall, students completed two required workshops. One is in scholarly writing. The other is a new online research and statistics workshop that is taken during the summer prior to entrance. This course brings all who have come to us with research backgrounds that vary tremendously to the same level when they enter their first statistics and research courses. Overall, the research sequence has been strengthened. The new curriculum was reviewed at the end of the first year and over the summer. Adjustments were made to the History and Philosophy course, the

integrative seminar, the contemporary theories course, and the writing workshop.

The university's commitment to objective measurement of outcomes has spurred further examination of our method of assigning grades to the comprehensive exam. The Doctoral Program committee has developed a set of rubrics for existing comprehensive exams. This system was piloted for the spring 2010 comps. However, it was found that the rubrics were inconsistently applied and the majority of graders were unable to use them. In part due to the difficulty in applying the rubrics, the program committee at the end of the spring semester questioned both the rubrics themselves and the capacity of the present comprehensive exam to test the program and course objectives. A process was begun that is to continue in the fall of 2010 to revise the format of comps to reflect more accurately the content of specific courses. The new system will be in place in the spring of 2011.