

# Assessment Guidance for Graduate Programs

## Selecting Measures

Effective assessment of Learning Outcomes (LOs) requires collecting *direct* evidence of student performance. A direct measure of assessment includes a student work sample (or student artifact) that demonstrates a student's knowledge, skills, and/or abilities, as well as a tool for evaluating that work.

Some of the more common student work samples used to assess LOs at the graduate level are:

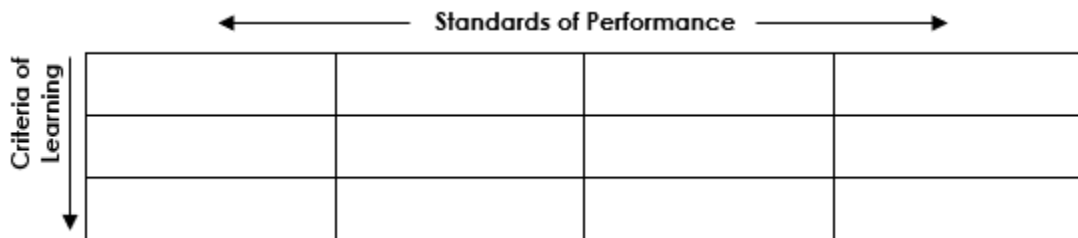
- Comprehensive Exams
- Proposals
- Thesis
- Dissertation
- Capstone project or experience
- Course assignments (non-thesis track)

One of the most effective tools for evaluating student work samples is the rubric. Rubrics are comprised of two elements – criteria of learning and standards of performance. There are two types of rubrics.

*Holistic rubrics* provide a description of the student's work across all criteria for each level of performance. This yields an overall summary score of a student's performance that has limited value for assessing learning outcomes.

*Analytical rubrics*, on the other hand, disaggregate student performance by learning criteria. This provides more diagnostic information that helps programs to identify areas of student learning in need of improvement.

Analytical rubrics are typically formatted as a grid with the rows representing the criteria of learning and the columns representing the standards of performance. Each cell contains a description of the criterion at that level of performance.



**A Note about Grades**

Although grades are an assessment of student performance, they have limited use when it comes to assessing program level LOs. Knowing the average grade in a course was 85% doesn't reveal anything about where students are excelling and where they could be performing better. The same holds true for Pass/Fail grades often used at the graduate level. More specific, diagnostic information is needed for programs to determine where improvement is needed.

Examples of assessment measures for discipline specific LOs are provided Appendix A.

Below are tips for creating rubrics and links to sample rubrics for evaluating theses/dissertations, comprehensive exams, and capstone projects.

#### *Tips for Creating Rubrics*

1. Limit rubric to one page per learning outcome
2. Limit performance standards to 3 to 5 levels
3. Include 2 or more learning criteria that are:
  - Appropriate
  - Definable
  - Observable
  - Distinct from one another
  - Complete
4. Include performance level descriptions that are:
  - Descriptive
  - Clear
  - Cover the whole range of performance
  - Distinguish among levels
  - Center the target performance at the proper level
5. Consider adapting an existing rubric

#### *Links to Sample Rubrics*

[Graduate Program Assessment Rubrics \(Kansas State University\)](#)

[Rubrics for assessing Dissertations \(Texas A&M-Commerce\)](#)

[Rubric for Evaluating Thesis/Dissertation \(UW Madison\) \(Word Doc\)](#)

[Written Thesis and Oral Defense Rubric \(University of South Carolina\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Comprehensive Exam \(Martin Luther College\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Comprehensive Examination Rubric \(University of Miami\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Capstone Rubric \(Kennesaw State University\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Capstone Project Rubric \(Minnesota State University\) \(PDF\)](#)

#### *Other Assessment Measures*

In addition to scores from rubrics, data from indirect sources can be a useful complement to direct assessment measures. An indirect measure examines the perceptions of students and others on the learning that has occurred. Examples of indirect measures include:

- exit interviews
- student/alumni/employer surveys
- focus groups
- course evaluations
- grades
- conference presentations

Faculty comments and observations are another source of information that can provide valuable insight when considering the results from both direct and indirect measures.

#### **Additional Assistance**

Additional resources can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness website at [https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/institutionaleffectiveness/academic\\_program\\_assessment\\_reporting\\_resources.html](https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/institutionaleffectiveness/academic_program_assessment_reporting_resources.html). You can also contact us at [assessment@southalabama.edu](mailto:assessment@southalabama.edu).

## Appendix

### Discipline-Specific Examples of Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all examples were selected from 2022-23 assessment plans for University of South Alabama graduate programs. Examples may have been edited for clarity, consistency, and completeness.

When reporting on Measures in *Planning & Self-Study (P&SS)*, both the Student Artifact and Assessment Tool should be included in the description of the measure.

#### **Biology MS**

| Learning Outcome   | Measures                                  |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Student Artifact                          | Assessment tool   |
| Students will illustrate expertise in a chosen area of individualized study.   | Comprehensive exam                        | Faculty developed rubric  |
| Students will be able to apply critical thinking skills to problem solve.  | Comprehensive exam                        | Faculty developed rubric  |
| Students will demonstrate an ability to apply the Scientific Method through an individualized, original thesis research project.       | Comprehensive exam<br>Thesis              | Faculty developed rubric<br>Faculty developed rubric completed by a committee of at least three faculty members |
| Students will be able to produce technical written and oral communications.  | Written Thesis<br>Prospectus presentation | Faculty developed rubric completed by a committee of at least three faculty members                             |
| Students will illustrate a breadth of basic biological knowledge through effective instruction of students at the undergraduate level. | Graduate Teaching Assistant assignment    | Faculty observation and Graduate Teaching Assistant Evaluation form   |

**Clinical Mental Health Counseling MS (Selected subset of outcomes)**

| Learning Outcome   | Measures   |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | Student Artifact   | Assessment tool   |
| Students will demonstrate professionalism and ethical reasoning.   | Internship<br>Student Professional Disposition   | Final Internship Evaluation Form<br>Faculty Disposition Review Form<br>Additional indirect measure:<br>Student Survey |
| Students will identify and describe theories and models of multicultural counseling, cultural identity development, and social justice and advocacy. | Course Exam<br>Counselor Preparation<br>Comprehensive Exam (national standardized exam): Social and Cultural Diversity Domain  | Exam Key<br>Score reports provided by test publishers   |
| Students will be able to apply theories and models of career development, counseling, and decision making.   | Course Assignment: Worker Interview – Students are required to interview a worker over the age of 50, gather their career development information, and write a report applying career development theory and discuss career decision making. | Faculty developed rubric  |
| Students will demonstrate basic counseling skills to include essential interviewing, counseling, and case conceptualization skills.                  | Course Assignment: Final Simulation Counseling Video – Students engage in a mock counseling session that last at least 20 minutes.   | Faculty developed rubric  |

**English MS**

| Learning Outcome   | Measures   |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | Student Artifact   | Assessment tool  |
| Students will be able to apply critical method/theory and synthesis appropriate scholarly sources in a written document using close reading and literary analysis.     | Capstone Project (an article length paper) and/or Thesis | Two to three graduate level faculty will independently score student work using a faculty developed rubric that reflects the learning objectives for literature.         |
| Students will be able to synthesize discipline-based information into oral presentations.  | Capstone Project Presentation/<br>Thesis Defense         | Two to three graduate level faculty will independently score student work using a faculty developed rubric that reflects the learning objectives for oral communication. |
| Creative writing students will be able to apply a high level of the conventions of their thesis genres – fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, and/or screen writing. | Thesis   | Two to three graduate level faculty will independently score student work using a faculty developed rubric that reflects the learning objectives for Creative Writing.   |

**Information Systems MSIS**

| Learning Outcome  | Measures   |                          |
|---|--|--------------------------|
|   | Student Artifact   | Assessment tool          |
| Students will be able to design and develop structured query language (SQL) statements and entity-relationship diagrams (ERDs) for advanced modeling scenarios.   | Comprehensive Final Exam in ISC561 IS Database Management – Sections on advanced SQL, normalization, and ER modeling will be evaluated.  | Faculty developed rubric |
| Students will demonstrate master project planning in multiple areas: project planning methods, leadership, stakeholder management, and technology.  | Comprehensive Final Exam in ISC565 IS Project Change Management – Sections on project planning methodologies, leadership, stakeholder management and technology.   | Faculty developed rubric |
| Students will be able to design and implement a web-based model-viewer-controller application with database connectivity, full create/read/update/delete functionality, and well-designed graphical user-interface. | Take-Home Final Exam Project in ISC559 IS App Design Implementation – Students are given a take-home project as the final exam in the course. The exam ties together applied application development KSAs learned throughout the course. | Faculty developed rubric |

### Audiology AuD

| Learning Outcome  | Assessment Measures  |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | Student Artifact   | Assessment tool   |
| Students will apply foundational audiology concepts to meet standards of independent professional practice. | Audiology Praxis Exam (Licensure Exam) – covers the following content areas: Foundations, Prevention and Identification, Assessment, Intervention, and Professional Issues | Publishers score report   |
| Students will employ evidence-based and valid decision-making skills in a clinical setting.                 | Clinicals  | AuD Clinical Evaluation Form – students are rated by their preceptor(s) on the following clinical skill domains: prevention, evaluation, analysis/interpretation, and aural rehabilitation/amplification. |
| Students will exhibit professionally appropriate behavior in clinical settings.                             | Clinicals<br><br>Grand Rounds Presentation   | AuD Clinical Evaluation Form – students are rated by their preceptor(s) on personal qualities, professional interactions, and preparedness.<br><br>Faculty developed rubric                               |
| Students will demonstrate proficiency in written communication in clinical settings.                        | Clinicals  | AuD Clinical Evaluation Form – students are rated by their preceptor(s) on written communications.  |

### **Clinical and Counseling Psychology PhD**

| <b>Learning Outcome</b>  | <b>Assessment Measures</b>  |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <b>Student Artifact</b>   | <b>Assessment tool</b>   |
| Students will demonstrate their understanding of and ability to apply advanced knowledge of research methods and statistics in clinical and counseling psychology.   | <p>Doctoral Dissertation Defense - The Doctoral Dissertation is a relatively independent project in which the student demonstrates the capacity for original research, the ability to review appropriate background material, formulate and address significant question(s), obtain, collate, and analyze data, and draw logical conclusions, and integrate the new knowledge into the greater body of existing literature and state its significance.</p>  | Research Evaluation Rubric (faculty developed rubric)          |
| Students will apply the information and skills they have learned in the conduct of Health Service Psychology practice activities including assessment, intervention, consultation, and clinical supervision. | <p>Clinical Comprehensive Exam - The Clinical Comps is comprised of a written and oral component. The written portion of the exam consists of a clinical case report. Examinees will also present the case orally and be able to answer case relevant questions. As part of the oral portion of the exam, students are required to present video/audiotaped samples of their assessment and therapy skills with the client. Students should also be prepared to answer a broad range of questions related to child and/or adult psychopathology, assessment and treatment, the integration of research and research methodology, ethical and legal standards, individual and cultural diversity, and the supervision process, among others.</p> | Clinical Comps Exam Evaluation Form (faculty developed rubric) |

### ***Clinical and Counseling Psychology PhD***

| <b>Learning Outcome</b>  | <b>Assessment Measures</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <b>Student Artifact</b>  | <b>Assessment tool</b>                               |
| Students will demonstrate comprehension of advanced concepts, theories, facts, information, research findings, principles, and best practices in clinical and counseling psychology. | Discipline Specific Knowledge Comprehensive Evaluation – written examination for the specific disciplines established by the American Psychological Association. Each of the nine subsections includes an annotated bibliography, a synthesis, and a critical review of the literature included. | DSK Comps Evaluation Form (faculty developed rubric) |



### **Marine Sciences PhD**

| <b>Learning Outcome</b>   | <b>Assessment Measures</b>                                    |                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
|   | <b>Student Artifact</b>                                       | <b>Assessment tool</b>               |
| Students will be able to explain and discuss in-depth the foundational principles of 3 of the 4 core components of Marine Science: Biological, Chemical, Geographical, and Physical Oceanography. | Comprehensive written and oral exams                          | Faculty developed rubrics            |
| Student will be able to effectively review and synthesize literature specific to their field of study.  | Dissertation  | Faculty developed rubric             |
| Students will be able to apply the appropriate methods needed to address a research question.   | Dissertation<br>Comprehensive written and oral exams          | Faculty developed rubrics            |
| Students will be able to conduct basic level technical computing as related to their particular field.  | Course Exam   | Exam Key or Faculty developed rubric |
| Students will be able to derive evidence-based conclusions through the objective analysis and interpretation of data.   | Dissertation<br>Comprehensive written and oral exams          | Faculty developed rubrics            |
| Students will demonstrate the ability to orally communicate concepts and methodology of their field.  | Presentation of dissertation prospectus                       | Faculty developed rubric             |
| Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate concepts and methodologies of their specialization through written materials.  | Written dissertation prospectus<br>Comprehensive written exam | Faculty developed rubrics            |
| Students will demonstrate an understanding of ethical conduct and best practices in the scientific community.   | Course Exam   | Exam Key                             |