

AMST Graduate Program

1. Past Assessment Summary

In our previous assessment report from fall 2022, we mentioned that the AMST program had been in flux due to five changes in leadership between 2020 and 2022. Beginning in fall 2022, a new program director started the position, which has helped bring stability to the MA and doctoral programs. During this time, the AMST assessment committee implemented changes in our data sources. In line with the comments we received, the committee recognized that merely passing the qualifying exams or successfully defending the dissertation is not a suitable data source for measuring the effectiveness of learning. Based on comments in our last review, we designed a new tool that will aid in assessing our program learning outcomes for oral communication skills and that will go beyond merely reporting the pass rates for our graduate students.

2. Action Research Question

Our action research question this year was “Is our tool for assessing students’ oral communication skills an effective means of measuring this ability?” To provide some context for this decision, it should be noted that a few years ago we decided we would no longer require graduate students to take a one-credit class, AMST 592: Seminar, which was the course we used to assess their oral communication skills. We made this change because graduate students had difficulty fitting the seminar into their schedules which added a burden to their efforts to complete their programs in a timely manner. Based on this change, we decided we would implement a questionnaire which would ask graduate chairs or committee members to assess graduate students’ oral communication skills.

3. Assessment Plan, Schedule and Data Source

AMST MA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART					
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	DATA SOURCE	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Learning Outcome #1: Our graduate students will be able to conduct research appropriate to the discipline.	Randomly selected student papers	xx			
Learning Outcome #2: Our graduate students will be able to demonstrate mastery of subject content knowledge and methodologies.	Randomly selected student papers	xx			
Learning Outcome #3: Our graduate students will demonstrate effective written communication.	Written & oral comprehensive exams				xx
Learning Outcome #4: Our graduate students will demonstrate effective oral communication.	Oral comprehensive exams; MA and dissertation defense			xx	
Learning Outcome #5: Our graduate students will demonstrate the ability to conduct research in an ethical manner	Completion of CITI training		xx		

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b) What are the threshold values for which your program demonstrates student achievement?

MA Program Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source(s)*
Learning Outcome #4: Our graduate students will demonstrate effective oral communication.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Oral comprehensive exam; MA and dissertation defense</i>
Learning Outcome #5: Our graduate students will demonstrate the ability to conduct research in an ethical manner	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is 100% of assessed students.</i>	<i>Completion of CITI Training</i>

AMST PHD PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART					
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	DATA SOURCE	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Learning Outcome #1—Our graduate students will produce and defend an original, significant contribution to knowledge appropriate to the discipline.	Randomly selected student papers	xx			
Learning Outcome #2—Our graduate students will demonstrate mastery of subject content knowledge and methodologies.	Randomly selected student papers	xx			
Learning Outcome #3—Our graduate students will demonstrate effective written communication.	Written & oral comprehensive exams				xx
Learning Outcome #4—Our graduate students will demonstrate effective oral communication.	Oral comprehensive exam; MA and dissertation defense			xx	
Learning Outcome #5—Our graduate students will demonstrate the ability to conduct scholarly activities in an ethical manner.	Completion of CITI training		xx		

b) What are the threshold values for which your program demonstrates student achievement?

PhD Program Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source(s)*
Learning Outcome #4: Our graduate students will demonstrate effective oral communication.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Oral comprehensive exam; MA and dissertation defense</i>
Learning Outcome #5: Our graduate students will demonstrate the ability to conduct research in an ethical manner	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is 100% of assessed students.</i>	<i>Completion of CITI Training</i>

4. What Was Done

- a. **Self-reporting Metric (required answer): Was the completed assessment consistent with the program's assessment plan? NO**

If not, please explain the adjustments that were made.

We ended up making adjustments to our plan based on changes to the graduate program requirements, specifically regarding the AMST 594 seminar, which is no longer required. Learning Outcome #4 now uses a new data source to determine our graduate students' success. We also needed to add new rubrics for Learning Outcomes #4, as a result of these changes.

- b. **How were data collected and analyzed and by whom? Please include method of collection and sample size.**

For Learning Outcome #4, we developed a questionnaire that asks graduate chairs or committee members to provide specific feedback and comments on the graduate students' ability to communicate effectively in the oral exam or doctoral defense. We also requested information about areas that need improvement as well as additional comments or suggestions for the assessment committee and the AMST program. The program director contacted the graduate chair or a committee member before each graduate student's qualifying exam, MA defense, or doctoral defense and requested that the faculty member complete the questionnaire. The results included comments such as the "student was able to respond to inquiries thoroughly and lucidly," the student's ideas "sometimes [became] bogged down in jargon" but they "are working on this," "the student was able to field questions from the audience easily" and the student had "trouble sharing . . . PowerPoint slides." Finally, one faculty member noted that the student "gave a professional and engaging presentation" that also "appealed to the substantial audience

of non-academics.” The faculty member concluded by saying “I would love to see more defenses like this one.” This year, we met our threshold of 75% for this Learning Outcome.

For Learning Outcome #5, the program director implemented another change by asking graduate students to complete CITI training early in the semester and to submit the certificate of completion to the director. There was some initial confusion about which research ethics training our graduate students should take through OSP, but we were able to finally settle the matter and have all students complete the training at the beginning of the semester, thus meeting our threshold for this learning outcomes. We also discussed the possibility of having our graduate students complete their research ethics training during the summer before they start the program. Ultimately, we decided that this will work for some students but not others. Therefore, we agreed to make CITI training a requirement for both AMST 501 and AMST 502. This way, if students enter the program during the fall or the spring, they will still be responsible for completing the training by the end of the first month of that term.

c. Please provide a rubric that demonstrates how your data were evaluated.

Indicators	Beginning - 1	Developing- 2	Competent- 3	Accomplished- 4
Our graduate students will demonstrate effective oral communication	The student has difficulty describing and summarizing the findings of their research project to their committee and/or public audience	The student is able to describe and summarize the findings of their research project to their committee and/or public audience	The student is able to discuss what is at stake in their larger project and how their work contributes to the field.	The student is able to effectively engage the audience with ease and authority.
Our graduate students will demonstrate the ability to conduct research in an ethical manner.	The student did not complete the training by the due date assigned by the program director	n/a	n/a	The student completed the training by the due date assigned by the program director

5. What Was Learned

d) Based on the analysis of the data, and compared to the threshold values established, what was learned from the assessment?

We learned that it was a good decision to implement a questionnaire that asks graduate chairs or committee members to assess graduate students’ oral communication skills. At a future meeting, we will discuss whether or how to share the findings with the graduate student. Because we won’t have the feedback about their oral communication skills until after their oral exam or dissertation defense is over, it may be difficult to forward those comments to students, especially if they are no longer in town.

e) What areas of strength in the program were identified from this assessment process?

By the time they take their qualifying exams and upon completion of their degrees, our graduate students have developed strong connections to their area of research. It's been a pleasure to see them become experts in a particular area of American Studies scholarship and note the excitement they have in sharing their research findings during their oral qualifying exams and thesis or dissertation defenses.

- f) What areas were identified that either need improvement or could be improved in a different way from this assessment process?**

The AMST assessment committee agreed that we will need to discourage students from scheduling their exams or defenses through WebEx or Zoom. It can be difficult if a student runs into technical problems while conducting the exam or defense online without tech support nearby. This happened in the past and delayed the start of the meeting as a result. COVID introduced this as a possibility in previous years, but moving forward, we would like to strongly discourage students from taking the oral exam or conducting the defense online.

6. How We Responded

- f) Describe how “What Was Learned” was communicated to the department, or program faculty. How did faculty discussions re-imagine new ways program assessment might contribute to program growth/improvement/innovation beyond the bare minimum of achieving program learning objectives through assessment activities conducted at the course level?**

The AMST assessment committee met on September 30th to discuss the graduate program's assessment. Beyond that topic, we also talked about ways of making sure graduate students understood the development of AMST as a field of study beyond the early Parrington years and the myth-and-symbol school era. More coursework in both AMST 501 and AMST 502 on the New Americanist scholarship and later theoretical developments in the field would help with this problem.

- g) How are the results of this assessment informing changes to enhance student learning in the program?**

The discussions we had this fall will help faculty who are teaching in the program next semester or next year in developing or updating their graduate courses.

- h) If information outside of this assessment is informing programmatic change, please describe that.**

n/a

i) What support and resources (e.g. workshops, training, etc.) might you need to make these adjustments?

No additional resources are needed to implement these findings (although see 7a below for additional thoughts).

7. Closing the Loop(s). Reflect on the program learning outcomes, how they were assessed in the previous cycle (refer to #1 of the report), and what was learned in this cycle. What action will be taken to improve student learning objectives going forward?

We received a comment last time about whether we should have different learning outcomes or thresholds for our MA and PhD programs. Because we offer so few graduate classes in general, we don't think this is something we should focus on implementing at this point. We do hope to have an opportunity to conduct a joint hire with another CLS department in the future. Once this happens, we would be in a better position to address the possibility of expanding our course offerings at the graduate level. In that case, it might be a good idea to think more about this suggestion.

b) Self-Reporting Metric (required answer): Based on the findings and/or faculty input, will there be any curricular or assessment changes (such as plans for measurable improvements, or realignment of learning outcomes)?

Yes

No XX

In reviewing the last report that assessed the PLO(s) in this assessment cycle, what changes proposed were implemented and will be measured in future assessment reports?

In our assessment meeting, members of the committee also discussed how we could help students better prepare for their qualifying exams in general. One possibility involved having students write practice exams a few months prior to the official exam. These questions would be modeled on a previous year's exams and would be timed. This practice might help take pressure off the student so that they can also prepare more fully for the oral qualifying exam and/or defense.

d) Have you seen a change in student learning based on other program adjustments made in the past? Please describe the adjustments made and subsequent changes in student learning.

Because the current director has only been in the position for two years and has only submitted one assessment report for the graduate program, it may be another year or two before we are able to notice a change in student learning based on program adjustments made as a result of our assessments.

Submit report to programassessment@montana.edu

Update Department program assessment report website.

Update PLO language in CIM if needed ([Map PLOs to Course LOs](#))