

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Summary

Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, Indigenous Studies MA

College of Indigenous Studies

2023-2025 Mid-Cycle Review

Submitted by: Sean Asikluk Topkok
Contact Information: cstopkok@alaska.edu
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1. SLOA plan

There are three primary criteria used for evaluating student learning under the MA in Indigenous Studies (note here that these are similar to our other degree program, typically, in Indigenous Studies (PhD)):

1. Performance in academic coursework,
2. Successful completion of a comprehensive exam during the semester before graduation (or earlier), and,
3. Submission and successful defense of a final project dissertation, as determined by the student's graduate committee.

Student outcomes and assessment align with the mission and goals of the Indigenous Studies program, in addition to successful completion of coursework, assessment criteria and procedures include:

1. Ability to apply knowledge and skills gained in implementing practical solutions to real-world problems,
2. Compare and analyze the epistemological properties, worldviews and modes of transmission associated with various Indigenous knowledge systems,
3. Apply cross-cultural understandings and communication skills,
4. Effective collaboration with Indigenous Peoples,

5. Apply principles of cross-cultural and indigenous research methodologies and methods,
6. Conduct research relevant to Indigenous communities that contributes to cultural, practices, community wellbeing, and quality of life.

Student outcomes are assessed through comprehensive exams: research proposal, literature review and methodology; the graduate committee also conducts and evaluates student outcomes through the oral comprehensive exam. Committee chairs closely monitor students' IRB application, the research process and dissemination of research. Here is the more specific description of this evaluative process, adapted from and necessarily related to the Indigenous Studies PhD requirements, into which many of our graduating MAs continue their studies:

1. Research Proposal:

Through the work demonstrated in the research proposal, the student's committee is able to assess the scope, scale, applicability, and feasibility of the student's intended research. These comprehensive exams component measure the students' capacity for recognizing academic problems and social issues surrounding Indigenous peoples and their lives (roles and well-being). Importantly, it also requires the student to demonstrate an understanding of the particulars of the issue, the interrelatedness of the issue's components, and initial ideas (theoretically and methodologically) for addressing these. Here is where the student can express their academic interest within the context of Indigenous Studies according to the focuses and expectations taught in our classes.

2. Literature Review:

The thirty-second of the academic papers that make up a comprehensive exam is the literature review. Here the students demonstrate their capacity to research earlier work related to or relevant to their own current work. Through this exercise and subsequent paper, the students show their capacity to perform pre-research to ensure that earlier work is not replicated. Additionally, students are required to perform an assessment of the sources discovered and intended to be used in the students' MA field research and dissertation. Through the literature review the students' awareness of prior research, knowledge of how to access relevant research materials, and how to assess their value critically.

3. Methodology:

The academic paper is intended to make use of the first two, completing the comprehensive exam written requirements. Here the students provide a detailed explanation of their methodology, including how the methods are supported by the student's theoretical approach(es), how their theoretic approaches guide their choice and application of methods, and why the chosen methods are the most well suited to addressing the research questions, hypotheses, and/or academic problem addressed by the student.

Assessment:

The full graduate committee reviews, comments, and edits each of the comprehensive exam papers, providing advice throughout, and assessing the progress of the student according to factors that are determined for each student's research. As an inherently interdisciplinary program, the Indigenous Studies MA requirements differ from student-to-student, and assessment is unique to each project, with an emphasis on the projects' effects on the hosting research community. Common assessment points that can be applied to any project, such as the effective use of Indigenous research methods, worldview considerations, and applicability/relevance of research, are applied to all students' projects. Gaps noted during these assessments are identified by the graduate committee, who then makes decisions regarding the filling of these gaps: revision of comprehensive exam papers, additional mini-papers within the comprehensive exam process that help to address specific issues, or the requirements to take additional class(es).

Oral exam:

The graduate committee also conducts and evaluates student outcomes through the Oral Comprehensive Exam. Here the students are required to present on their learning objectives of the comprehensive exam papers, and most importantly, here is where the graduate committee ask the students to elaborate on ideas presented in the written exams, and where the students are required to answer questions from the committee regarding their work in the exams, and on upcoming fieldwork. With the successful completion of the written and oral portions of the comprehensive exam process, the

students are advanced to candidacy and are required to complete and Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of their proposed research (and research ethics is highly important to our department and is expected of all our graduate students).

Institutional Review Board process:

Committee chairs closely monitor students' IRB applications, the research process, and dissemination of research. The IRB is often the point where the student first thinks in great detail about the fieldwork aspect of their research, and the ethical considerations involved. As most of our students work with Indigenous communities—especially Alaska Native communities—ethics is central to our curricula. This includes working alongside community members as research partners, sharing the research, allowing for community review and assessment, and disseminating the research effectively for the benefit of the community.

MA Research Project Assessment:

The purpose of the project assessment is to evaluate the effects of students' fieldwork on the community, in terms of its impacts—positive or negative—on community wellbeing, and its effectiveness on addressing social problems that may be the focus of a study. Research design assessments involve evaluating the effects of ongoing collaboration with villages including data collection, analysis, outcomes, findings, and dissemination to community and other research partners. Student researchers working in Indigenous communities are expected to 1) develop their community engagement plan early in the research process and 2) assess the impact of their engagement both in terms of the quality and rigor of their research, as well as the perceived/understood benefits of the research by the community. This is done in collaboration with the graduate committee, which can require revisions of the research plan according to the ethical principles of research with Indigenous peoples.

Again, assessments within the Indigenous Studies MA are three-pronged:

1. course performance assessment: grades, and qualitative follow-up discussions with students by their graduate committee chair,
2. comprehensive exams assessment: qualitative assessment of knowledge (including ethics) learned, and innovations developed, to address topics of focus in upcoming research, appropriate use of Indigenous and related methodologies and theoretical approaches, and
3. MA research project assessment: qualitative assessment of the value, effects, and success of MA project in academic and local community contexts.

2. Review of Student Success Data

During the period covered in this mid-cycle review (2023-2025) there were two student who completed their program. Since the inception of the MA program in 2002, there are currently 33 scholars who have earned their MA degree. Of the graduates, 19 identify as female, one identifies as non-binary, while the 12 identify as male. Those who self-identify as being Indigenous are 17 graduates.

Tracking of students following graduation:

Students are tracked following graduation through email inquiries regarding their employment and overall well-being. Most respond, but inevitably some few do not.

As our MA program is much smaller than our PhD program, only two students have graduated during the period of this review (2023-2025), and so the outcomes of this student alone was used for data collection. The student was rated according to the categories above: coursework, comprehensive exam, final project or thesis, and criteria 1-6 above. The student performed well according to each of these categories, and according to the assessment information provided above. These students completed their degree before the seven years allowed to a master's student. One is now an employee in a Native organization in outside Alaska, and the other is conducting research in their respective communities.

For the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) accreditation, the rubrics for student outcomes are published in the Alaska Cultural Standards: Cultural Standards for Students: <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/Standards.html>

3. Summary Reports – what curricular changes or program discussions are happening as a result of the conclusions drawn above?

Curricular changes are made in the MA program in Indigenous Studies semester-by-semester according to the evaluations according to students, instructor self-evaluations, and once a year, evaluation of classes overall. As student needs shift, and as social and cultural needs and concerns change regarding Indigenous peoples and their communities, class curricula are revised, and new courses are created—first as special topics and then, if enough interest has been shown, as standard classes.

At the present these outcomes assessments are qualitatively evaluated at the level of course, graduate advisory committee, and departmental review. Besides the quantitative evaluations of the classes (in part) by students in our classes, we prefer to use qualitative categorical measures that more fully enable an understanding of student needs and learning outcomes—these are generally created by the instructor who best knows what kind of qualitative evaluation is most relevant and useful to their class. Once a year, the entire department reviews all class curricula together to assure that these curricula are timely, accurate, and useful to the student in the present.

Though our MA program is small—currently we have ten active MA students.

As with the Indigenous Studies PhD program based on the very positive results achieved by our students according to the criteria discussed above. Not only is this evidenced by the consistent employment opportunities available to our students, but also by the frequent word-of-mouth promotion of our programs by current and former students, resulting in many more applicants per year than we have faculty capacity to handle (in both the MA and PhD programs combined).

4. Goals for Improvement - how do your proposed curricular changes or program discussions result from an inclusive, collaborative process?

Our curricular changes and program discussions include our three faculty, our emeritus affiliated, and collaborative faculty when possible, student evaluations of courses (both qualitatively and quantitatively), and traditional knowledge bearers from Indigenous communities, or other Indigenous communities beyond Alaska (including internationally). Specifically in answer to the question from the instructions, Dr. Michael Koskey, Dr. Sean Asikluk Topkok, Dr. Chris Cannon, and Dr. Yoko Kuogo have participated in data analysis and curricular planning and changes. The results are shared with students through the classes themselves, and with the wider stakeholder community through meetings, email listservs, social media posts, and informal conversation (often the preferred method in Indigenous communities). Though the majority of changes in curricula stem from student evaluations and an annual department review of course curricula, we remain always open to guidance and advice from Indigenous knowledge bearers—especially Elders and community leaders.