

Quality Assessment in Graduate Programs

University of Florida, College of
Veterinary Medicine

Accountability

- One of the main tenets of Governor Bush's administration in Tallahassee
 - We are asked to regularly assess where we are going and how well we are doing
 - Budgets often depend upon the quality and outcomes of those assessments

University's Assessment Process

- Identify specific functional goals of each graduate degree program
- Identify a method of assessment of how well we are meeting that functional goal

University's Assessment Process

- Report the results of the assessment annually
- Describe how the graduate program has been changed a result of the assessment
- Note that information must be relatively objective and quantifiable
 - Concerns this limited what could be done

**An example of one such
assessment item for the
MS degree program from
the 2000-2001 academic
year:**

FUNCTIONAL GOAL

- Students will attain the necessary technical skills, knowledge and attitudes to obtain suitable employment or pursue advanced education

ASSESSMENT METHOD

- Determination of current employment or advanced studies status by survey of former students and/or their MS supervisory committee chairs

RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT

- Current employment status of 28 students earning MS degree 1996-2001:
 - Appropriately employed - 16
 - Under employed - 2
 - Continuing with education - 8
 - Home with children by choice - 1
 - Lost to follow up - 1

RESULTING CHANGES

- No change is planned since performance meets or exceeds expectation

**Functional goals and
assessment methods for
the Veterinary Medical
Sciences MS and PhD
degree programs:**

MS Degree

- Students will attain the necessary technical skills, knowledge and attitudes to obtain suitable employment or pursue advanced education
- Determination of current employment or advanced studies status by survey of former students and/or their MS supervisory committee chairs

MS Degree

- Students will learn an appropriate body of knowledge in their area of specialty within the broader areas of animal health, animal biology, and biomedical science
- Follow-up survey of students at graduation and 5 years post graduation to determine whether the knowledge base gained was adequate both in depth and in scope

MS Degree

- Students will learn speaking skills needed to communicate orally in formal or informal settings
- Track numbers of presentations made at external scientific meetings and/or continuing education presentations. Teaching assistantship performance evaluations where appropriate. Foreign students must pass the Test of Spoken English before being permitted to teach

MS Degree

- Students will learn scientific writing skills
- Track thesis-related and other publications

PhD Degree

- Students will attain the necessary technical skills, knowledge and attitudes to obtain suitable employment or pursue advanced education
- Determination of current employment or advanced studies status by survey of former students and/or their MS supervisory committee chairs

PhD Degree

- Students will learn an appropriate body of knowledge in their area of specialty within the broader areas of animal health, animal biology, and biomedical science
- Follow-up survey of students at graduation and 5 years post graduation to determine whether the knowledge base gained was adequate both in depth and in scope

PhD Degree

- Students will learn speaking skills needed to communicate effectively within formal or informal settings, to their peers, their students and the general public
- Track numbers of presentations made at external scientific meetings and or continuing education presentations. Teaching Assistantship performance evaluations where appropriate. Foreign students must pass the Test of Spoken English before being permitted to teach

PhD Degree

- Students will learn scientific writing skills to effectively communicate with their peers and as well will learn the skills needed to explain their research to the general public
- Track the number of publications by dissertation-related and unrelated publications

Why these goals and methods of assessment?

- **Employment status tells us 2 things**
 - **Is the scholarship sufficiently sound to allow our graduates to compete effectively for jobs that make use of their degrees**
 - **In field of study vs. selling insurance**

Why these goals and methods of assessment?

- **Employment status tells us 2 things**
 - **Are graduates competitive for higher quality positions within their chosen field**
 - **Prestigious research university vs. community college**
 - **Are they doing what they wanted to do for a career?**

Why these goals and methods of assessment?

- If many are un-/underemployed:
 - Not providing adequate training
 - Not providing adequate career counseling
 - Training more than the market will bear

Why these goals and methods of assessment?

- Knowledge base - students' perception of how well we taught them
 - Knowledge of the field of science
 - Other aspects of how to be a scientist
 - Critical thinking
 - Networking
 - Grantsmanship

Why these goals and methods of assessment?

- Oral and written communications skills
 - Formal and informal oral and written communications
 - Within the field of science
 - To make their knowledge available
 - To general audiences
 - To have the public understand what they are doing and why it is important that this work be done

Selected Findings & Resulting Changes

- Something that is working well:
Employment
 - Virtually no one un-/underemployed by choice
 - Attributed to
 - Aggressive strategy of adding breadth to PhD degree for non DVMs
 - Strong concurrent degree/certification programs
 - MPH, LLD, MBS, Forensic Toxicology certificate
 - Career counseling with emphasis on alternate careers
 - Aggressive placement efforts
 - A big plus in recruiting

Selected Findings & Resulting Changes

- Something that needs improvement: Communication with general audiences
 - Typical writing aimed at general audiences was as readable as IRS tax form instructions
 - Faculty mentors did not feel this was a priority, especially those in the basic sciences
 - I now require general audience abstracts on all submissions through my office, including intramural grant proposals
 - Formal training program under development with College of Journalism faculty and others