

# Just Nuts and Bolts?

## Engaging Professionalization Outcomes in Humanities Graduate Education

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### Session Goals

- Introduce the Interdisciplinary Humanities graduate program's assessment philosophy
- Review our assessment approach to theories and research methods (PLO 1)
- Feature professionalization as an integral part of theory and methods outcomes

### Program Background and Vision

Established in 2014, the Interdisciplinary Humanities graduate group has transitioned from individualized study to a comprehensive graduate program. To provide intellectual breadth and depth, IH graduate program is designed to unify humanist disciplines and methodologies.

### Program Learning Outcomes

- *Current focus: PLO 1 Become proficient in selected theories and research methods appropriate to the study of the humanities*
- PLO 2 Understand both disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the humanities
- PLO 3 Achieve domain expertise in a particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary field of the humanities
- PLO 4 Demonstrate proficiency in research, analysis, and critique in the humanities through exams, papers, and theses
- PLO 5 Display commitment to the research ethics and professional standards of the humanities and to the particular field of expertise

### Assessment Philosophy and Current Process

As a multidisciplinary humanities group, we believe that assessment should reflect program priorities and inform pedagogy. Our approach, then, focuses on how an outcome is learned, practiced, and valued. The following principles guide our planning:

- We are educating graduate students as peers and independent scholars. Assessment, then, should provide graduate students with opportunities to engage in program priorities, analyze information, and reflect on their own beliefs.
- Open-ended discussion reflects an academic culture that values collective faculty and student input. Patterns from discussion and sample review constitute a framework, which is sometimes referred to as dynamic criteria mapping.<sup>1</sup>
- Resulting graduate-level rubrics, then, are intended to guide student work and encourage original ways of thinking. Our current PLO assessment process focuses on faculty interviews with IH 201 co-instructors and dissertation advisors. Analysis also includes course evaluations, student annual progress reports, and syllabus review.

<sup>1</sup> For mapping dynamic criteria or developing descriptive rubric language, we recommend Bob Broad's [Organic Writing Assessment](#) (2009) as a resource

## *What Did We Learn?*

### **From faculty interviews in IH 201: Theories and Methods:**

Theory Development: “Engaging in theory is largely about entering a conversation with scholars and working with frameworks. Having an independent perspective and being able to re-interpret these concepts in light of your own work is the goal. Employing imagination, beyond simply assimilation of evidence, is essential.”

Professionalization: “With conference-style presentations, students collaborated to find synergies among their work. An author from a course reading joined the seminar via Skype to discuss interdisciplinary scholarship and her own passage from coursework to dissertation to book. These experiences enriched students’ ability to value theory and interdisciplinary research methodologies.”

### **From annual progress reports:**

From these reports nearly all IH students have attended at least one national conference. The subtotal of attendance or invited presentations reflects high engagement (2-3 times annually) with participating in professional development and sharing UCM humanities research. Further, partnerships with the Center for the Humanities have provided opportunities for IH graduate students to attend research presentations beyond seminars, offer conference posters, and engage in event coordination.

Other activities associated with fellowships and dissertation development involves Institutional Review Board reviews of data analysis proposals. Employment experiences beyond teaching also relate to research theories and methods. In one example, an IH graduate student with a graduate research appointment last spring semester was a project coordinator for a study on valley fever among Hispanic farm workers in Kern County. This emphasis on fieldwork related to interviews and observations reflects integration between theory and practice.

### **From teaching assignment analysis:**

Part of the charges for the Education Policy committee is to advise on graduate student teaching assignments with cognate disciplinary fields; however, some instructional needs from other programs will lead to the dean assigning our students to teach in outside disciplines. Examining course assignments in IH this year, TA course assignments very often have content that addresses humanities research methods. These teaching experiences extend exposure to theories and methods, providing opportunities to translate and apply this learning outcome within teaching contexts.

## *Next Steps?*

- Enrich Seminar Opportunities: Continue partnerships with the Center for the Humanities
- Engage Direct Evidence: Review of sample work from IH core courses and consider a dissertation abstract requirement
- Continue Indirect Evidence: Interview advanced to candidacy students about theory and methods topics, with an emphasis on professionalization interests and skills
- Revise Policy and Practice: Implement teaching assignment survey that involves a faculty advisor – graduate student conference to complete, with an emphasis on undergraduate teaching and research interest synergies