Environmental Studies Students' Ability to Evaluate Research

Environmental Studies MS – College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Step 1: Student Learning Outcome

Students will demonstrate their ability to utilize information resources and technology to organize and evaluate environmental research

Step 2: Methods and Measures

Direct: Essay written in ENST 500 (Environmental Issues and Approaches) and scored with a rubric.

Indirect: Online Exit Survey for students who completed their capstone experience (thesis, project or comprehensive exam).

Step 3: Criteria for Success

Direct: 75% of student essays are rated "adequate" or "distinguished".

Indirect: 75% of students rate the "impact that Environmental Studies courses have had on improving (their) competencies for the outcome" as "moderate" to "outstanding".

Step 4: Results

Direct: 22 students across two section of ENST 500 in fall 2017 scored as follows: 18% "distinguished," 68% "good," 9% "adequate," and 5% (one student) received "fail."

Overall, 86% of students scored in the "adequate" or "distinguished" rating, which is far above the recommended target of 75%. The student rated as "fail" did not turn in a research essay. These results clearly demonstrate that the program succeeds in teaching students to utilize information resources and technology to organize and evaluate environmental research.

Indirect: 17 students (out of 23 eligible) completed the online Exit Survey questionnaire, with 66.7% of students rating the impact on courses improving their competencies for the outcome as "moderate" or "outstanding".

Although results are below the recommended target of 75%, the standard deviation was extremely high and students varied greatly in their responses with students giving extremely high and low marks.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

Direct: Based on this year's results of the direct assessment (86% success rate) no improvement actions are recommended at this time.

Indirect: Due to mixed results and limited data, the assessment committee and coordinator will enhance data collection and add more specific questions to the Exit Survey in order to better assess students' responses. The program aims to ascertain what specifically students deem missing or see as underdeveloped in preparing them to "utilize information resources and technology to organize and evaluate environmental research." Environmental Studies students pursue many different research interests across five different colleges, and methodologies vary widely depending on the discipline. Hence, to better prepare students across all fields of study, there is a need to assess why students think either very positively or very negatively about this aspect of the program.