

# Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Veterinary Biosciences  
Unit Head approval: Duncan Ferguson

Date: May 1, 2008

## SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

**Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

1. A new coordinator of graduate programs staff member was hired in 2007.
2. Graduate faculty are reviewing the course requirements for the MS and PhD degrees to make sure the content is appropriate.
3. A new training grant was received to support graduate students in the program.
4. The PhD examination process has been revisited noting areas of student strength and weakness.
5. A means to laboratory rotation for new students has been devised.
6. The department is participating with other graduate departments within the College of Veterinary Medicine to write a database program to track current student progress and graduated student outcomes. This new program should launch Fall Semester 2008.

## SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

**(a) PROCESS: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.**

1. A new department head was hired in 2006 who has provided new direction to the graduate program including the VSMP program and the residency programs in toxicology and clinical pharmacology
2. In 2007, two graduate program surveys were created. One survey was sent to the department graduate faculty and one survey was sent to the current graduate students in the program. There was a 50% return from the faculty and 75% return from the graduate students. This survey covered all aspects of the graduate program: application process, programs offered, courses offered, funding, examination process, advisor/student relationships, faculty support, staff support, greatest success and improvement needed. Once the survey results were received a graduate faculty meeting was held to discuss the findings. Changes to the program were voted on by the graduate faculty and approved for implementation by the Department Head.

**(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).**

**Outcome 1.**

Obtain a "B" or better in courses providing in depth subject matter knowledge, appropriate to degree and area of study.

**Outcome 2.**

Obtain a "B" or better in required courses and successfully passing the Qualifying Examination to show breadth of knowledge in the general subject area of interest.

**Outcome 3.**

Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills by presentation in departmental seminar courses with a letter grade of "B" or better.

**Outcome 4.**

Understand the ethics of scientific research by participation in college and departmental seminars on ethics.

**Outcome 5.**

Formulate a testable hypothesis by presenting a written research prospectus in NIH format and successfully passing the Preliminary Examination.

**Outcome 6.**

Function effectively as an instructor by performing a variety of teaching activities within the department.

**Outcome 7.**

Establish independent research skill by presenting research in a variety of venues, publishing in peer-reviewed journals and successfully passing the Final Examination.

**Outcome 8.**

Receipt of scientific awards.

**(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

1. Students provide annually a cumulative activities report to their graduate advisor who reviews and provides feedback to the student. This report is sent to the Graduate Program Coordinator who presents the reports of all students to the Graduate Studies Committee for their review. All students are provided with a written summary based upon their report, noting any areas needing improvement.
2. Students must obtain no lower grade than "B" on all coursework otherwise coursework will be repeated. Students must take a required set of courses.
3. Students are required to meet annually with the Graduate Program Coordinator who will conduct a progress-to-degree audit.

4. Students are required to meet each semester with their Graduate Advisory Committee to review current progress and plan for future projects and courses.
5. PhD students are required to sit for a Qualifying Examination covering their comprehensive and general knowledge and a Preliminary Examination covering their prospectus. The prospectus must be written and presented in the NIH grant format and the students are required to present their project in a seminar format and defend their project orally in meeting with their Preliminary Examination committee.
6. Successful MS thesis defense or PhD final dissertation defense.
7. All students practice classroom teaching techniques as TA's and through participation in various departmental seminars.
8. All students must participate in annual ethic seminars.
9. All students participate in posters/abstracts presentations and publish papers in peer-reviewed journals.
10. Department Head exit interview is conducted with all graduating students or students who leave the program for any reason.
11. Thesis deposit with Graduate College

### **SECTION 3 : PLANS FOR USING RESULTS**

**(a) PLANS: Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.**

1. The divisions of morphology, physiology and pharmacology/toxicology are considering degree specializations for students who are studying within their programs. This would require the students to take core courses in addition to those required by the department for graduate degrees.
2. Department plans to continue obtaining training grants to support students.
3. Participate in the college VMS Program to attract professional students with a research aptitude.
4. Propose a department name change to better reflect the research done in department which will result in better recruitment of new graduate students.
5. Graduate faculty to discuss ways to improve how the department prepares graduates as future instructors.
6. The department is considering a non-thesis MS option.

**(b) TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. Graduate Faculty will continue to meet annually to discuss issues pertaining to the graduate program, course requirements, review the assessment plan and make recommendations for improvement.
2. Beginning in 2008 a graduate/alumni survey will be created and sent to graduates who have recently graduated, been out 2 years and 5 years. This survey will be written to evaluate how well our graduates are prepared for the job market.