

## Transformative Studies Assessment Overview – 2015

The TSD program has scaffolded PLOs in courses that build on each other. Over 4 semesters, students should develop the knowledge base, capacities, and specific skills to engage in transdisciplinary research. The PLOs are quite explicit in most if not all of the courses. For example, the second semester course *Transdisciplinarity* is designed to prepare students to engage in transdisciplinary research. In the first semester, students already begin thinking about their topic, and how to approach it creatively in *Creative Inquiry*. In the third semester, students take *Ecology of Ideas*, which focuses on developing an appropriate knowledge base for their research and writing a transdisciplinary literature review. These courses build on each other and then lead to the 4<sup>th</sup> semester, where all the material is integrated in the literature review comprehensive exam. This involves writing an extensive literature review, and summarizing it in 5 pages for purposes of the dissertation proposal.

At the end of the first semester, the faculty teaching the courses meet to assess student progress, see if there are students who need help or are at risk, and also discuss how the various syllabi across the semester and working together. At the end of the second semester, a similar process occurs, where we identify students who are struggling and review the second semester courses. In the third semester, students develop an “elevator pitch” in which they discuss their research topic and the person they would like to be their chair. Working with students on these pitches gives us an opportunity to assess the students’ clarity, focus, ability to articulate their topic effectively, make a sound choice of chair, and so on. In the fourth semester, the comps are a further way of assessing students’ overall progress.

One issue that has come up is how the second semester *Transdisciplinarity* and *Varieties of Research* courses do not appear aligned. Based on the final assignments in the *Transdisciplinarity* courses, it has become clear that the courses present what appear to be conflicting processes and philosophies: many of the final papers seemed confused about the nature and role of theory, and the relationship between paradigms, theory, and method as they are presented in the two courses. This will be discussed at an upcoming faculty meeting and a faculty retreat, and changes will be made to address this. The role of the Comps is also not clear. There appear to be philosophical differences about whether they should be a cut-off point for students who can’t do independent research, or simply an opportunity to assist students who are struggling.

The most immediate evidence for the PLOs is the ongoing work students are doing as they develop their research project, how they approach their research, how they discuss it, and how they write about the process. In some cases there is a high degree of sophistication (as articulated in the proposal rubric, for example), and in other cases there seems to be much confusion. One of the challenges we face is to see to what extent the problems are a function of the curriculum, and to what extent it’s simply students not reading the appropriate materials. In the case of the

curriculum this involves not just individual courses, but how the courses interrelate and support each other—or not. We also review the quality of dissertations, and use them to spot any areas that need to be addressed (e.g., weak literature reviews).