

# Criminal Justice, Homeland Security Studies MS

## Demonstrate Core Knowledge Competency

### Goal Description:

Demonstrate that students are learning the core competency areas required in the field.

#### RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS

##### RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

### Demonstrate Knowledge And Integration Of Core Competencies

#### Learning Objective Description:

Students graduating with a master's degree in Security Studies will demonstrate comprehensive knowledge and assessment of the major issues and principles related to Homeland Security.

##### RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

### Integrated Major Paper

#### Indicator Description:

The Capstone course, CRIJ 6388, for Security Studies graduate students requires substantial research and integration of theories and principles of completed coursework in the program. The culminating project in this course requires students to state a Homeland Security or related issue and place it in context of the related security field. This paper requires a comprehensive literature reivew, analysis of the issue in relation to national threat, explanation of how the issue was reslolved, and how the issue may have been resolved differently. Through this anaylsis, core competencies in the field should be demonstrated.

#### Criterion Description:

The scoring rubric for the core competency project in the Capston course consists of four areas; 1) statement of the issue, 2) review of the salient literature, 3) appropriate sources cited, and 4) reflections of how the curriculum contribted to your abiltiy to solve the issue. Each student completing the capstone course will score 80% or higher on the rubric.

#### Findings Description:

During academic year 2015/16 so far, 12 students have completed the capstone requirement. Of those, all 12 achieved a score of 80+, with 75% of the total achieving a score of 90+. An additional 8 students are scheduled to complete the capstone requirement during summer semester 2016.

##### RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

### Improve Advising for Capstone Students

#### Action Description:

Pursuant to our objective to have our MS in Homeland Security Studies graduates demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the major issues and principles related to homeland security, we aim to improve faculty advising for students preparing for or completing their capstone projects. We want to see as many of our students as possible earning scores of 90+ on their capstones, and we believe that improved communication and faculty advising will help.

## Knowledge into Action: Professional Application of Coursework

### Goal Description:

Professional application of the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom.

#### RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS

##### RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

### Research, Critical Thinking and Analysis

#### Learning Objective Description:

Students completing the Master of Science degree in Security Studies will be able to think conduct research, think critically, and apply problem solving techniques to complex issues relating to the Homeland Security Enterprise.

##### RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

### Successful Performance In Practical Exercises And Internship

#### Indicator Description:

Integration of theoretical approaches to problem solving with practical analytical solutions is a primary indicator of the success of the program's learning objectives. During the internship experience, security studies graduate students routinely receive critiques and personal evaluations from both the faculty member monitoring the student (internship director) and the employer who supervises the student intern. In addition, students provide written progress reports during the internship process.

**Criterion Description:**

It is not enough to perform well in the classroom. Nearly each course students take in the Security Studies program requires successful completion of some measurable out-of-class project or outcome. Students will score greater than 85% on these practical exercises at the apex of their training experience during their internship.

**Findings Description:**

During academic year 2015/2016 so far, 12 students have completed the internship requirement. Of those, all achieved a score of 90+. During summer semester 2016, an additional 4 students are scheduled to complete the internship requirement.

**RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3**

**Prepare students for internships**

**Action Description:**

Pursuant to our goal to integrate theoretical approaches to problem solving with practical analytical solutions, we aim to better prepare our students for their internships. Performing well in the real world is a measure of the student's ability to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom. Accordingly, we will work this year to better prepare students for their internship experience by focusing on real-world problems and solutions in the field of Homeland Security. We will also help students develop interviewing skills (which will help them secure good internships) by requiring oral presentations in classes and encouraging them to treat such assignments as opportunities to practice presenting themselves in a professional capacity.

## **Update to Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement**

**Previous Cycle's Plan For Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify):**

1. We are now administering the face-to-face program as a cohort program, which has eliminated sources of confusion for students
2. We have hired two adjunct professors who have both academic credentials and real world experience

**Update of Progress to the Previous Cycle's PCI:**

In the last year, we had two important goals for the MS in Homeland Security Studies degree program: to continue to improve communications with students, and to continue to utilize the academic and the practitioner approaches to the field. For both of these goals we achieved important successes, described in greater detail below.

First, we wanted to improve our communications with our MS students, some of whom had been confused about program requirements, paths to graduation, etc. Such confusion is of course undesirable, but was understandable. Our chair was on loan from another department and our administrative assistant was brand new. Indeed, the degree program itself was new. In Fall 2014, we implemented a completely new curriculum and were discovering bugs in this new program as we went along. All of this meant that students sometimes would get conflicting answers to their questions from different people in the department, which could be frustrating.

Last year (2015-6), we worked to improve communications and increase transparency with our students. We began the year with an orientation for the new cohort that laid out program requirements, etc. We also had meetings with our second-year cohort to make sure they were on the path to graduation. We solicited feedback from students that came to us during office hours. We created opportunities for interaction outside the university setting (such as a departmental get-together at a professor's house). Anecdotal evidence suggests that these and other changes helped us make important strides in the right direction.

This year, we aim to do even better. In particular, we want to do the same kind of outreach with our online students that proved helpful with our face-to-face cohort. (We also want to make sure that we are building channels for communication with undergraduate students in our new minor, since many of them will enroll in our MS program.) A Homeland Security program, perhaps more than any other, should know and demonstrate the value of clear communication.

Second, we wanted to continue to utilize, and thus show the importance of, both the academic approach and the practitioner approach to the field of Homeland Security. The most concrete way in which we accomplished this goal was in our hiring decisions. We hired adjunct professors with both academic credentials and real world experience, and we hired a new professor (who also serves as chair) with a resume packed with both scholarly and practical achievement.

In this coming year, we hope to continue this practice. In particular, during this year's job search, we will look for candidates who are able to help bridge the divides between the worlds of academia, policy, and practice.

With these and other improvements in place, we look forward to a great year for the MS program in Homeland Security Studies.

## **Plan for Continuous Improvement**

### **Closing Summary:**

The homeland security enterprise emphasizes communication and coordination to solve complex problems, and the integration of knowledge and skills from different realms. Accordingly, in this school year (2016-7), we plan to improve the MS in Homeland Security Studies degree program in the following two ways:

First, we will continue to improve communications with our students. This means increasing transparency, and also ensuring that both formal and informal channels of communication are always open. In particular, we will try to improve our communications with our online MS students by preparing an orientation module which can be integrated into our required courses. For our face-to-face students, we will try to improve our advising for capstone students, to ensure that they are completing outstanding projects that showcase their skills and strengths.

Second, we will continue to bridge the gap between academia and the real world. This is a big job, but there are a few concrete things we can do to contribute to a better integration between these disparate realms. In our hiring decisions, we will look for candidates who utilize and integrate different approaches (academic, policy, and practitioner) to homeland security issues. And in our classes, we will seek to prepare our students to apply their skills in the real world, especially through their internship experiences.

These improvements will not only help our program succeed in its academic goals, but also bring us more fully in line with best practices in the field of homeland security.