

Assessment Cycle 2025–2026 Report

Program: Masters of Homeland Security (MS) (579)

School of Social Sciences and Applied Programs

College of Arts and Sciences

Graduate School

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Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

Graduate School Mission: Northwestern State University's Graduate School maintains its mission and purpose to develop, provide, and support innovative, responsive, and accessible graduate programs of the highest quality. The Graduate School promotes deep engagement with disciplinary literature, fosters innovative scholarly inquiry, and facilitates comprehensive professional development and practice opportunities. It further supports research by members of its academic community. The Graduate School is a source of intellectual capital for the University and contributes to the public welfare of the region, state, and nation.

College of Arts and Sciences Mission. The College of Arts & Sciences, the largest College at Northwestern State University, is a diverse community of scholars, teachers, and students working collaboratively to acquire, create, and disseminate knowledge through transformational, high-impact experiential learning practices, research, and service. The college aims to cultivate well-prepared graduates who can contribute meaningfully to society, equipped with the capability to promote economic and social development and improve the overall quality of life in the region. The College provides an unequaled undergraduate education in the social and behavioral sciences, English, communication, journalism, media arts, biological and physical sciences, the creative and performing arts, and at the graduate level in the creative and performing arts, English, TESOL, and Homeland Security. Uniquely, the College houses the Louisiana Scholars' College (the State's designated Honors College), the Louisiana Folklife Center, and the Creole Center, demonstrating its commitment to community service, research, and preservation of Louisiana's precious resources.

School of Social Sciences and Applied Programs. The School of Social Sciences and Applied Programs at Northwestern State University is dedicated to the education of students for professional, leadership, academic, and research careers in the challenging fields of criminal justice, public safety, homeland security, public service, and the social sciences. The school provides instruction across a broad range of concepts, with the ultimate goals of student attainment of excellence in analytical and critical thinking abilities, effective interpersonal, communication, problem-solving skills, moral commitment, and the acquisition

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of substantive bases of knowledge necessary to secure positions in criminal justice, all levels of government, public policy, and private organizations. Using active learning, participatory pedagogy, and a Global perspective, the school holds a generalist orientation, through innovative analyses, in a student-centered, nurturing environment, and emphasizing an occupational context.

Homeland Security Program Mission Statement: From the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to the current National Security Strategy, students will gain a distinct appreciation for the complexities of homeland security organizations, leadership, policies, ethics, and challenges through the review of pertinent literature, critical thinking, research, and reflective analysis and evaluation. The master's degree in Homeland Security is unique. It pushes students to develop plausible solutions to the relentless national, international, and transnational threats currently challenging global security through the innovative delivery of transformative student learning experiences, preparing graduates for life and career success in this ever-growing occupational field.

Purpose: The master's program will prepare students to engage in research from a cross-national and global perspective. It prepares students for entry positions in government and the private sector. Understanding, influencing, and responding to government policy from a national, international, and global security perspective is increasingly critical. It will also prepare interested students to pursue further/additional advanced degrees in Homeland Security, Political Science, Strategic Leadership, or International Relations at other institutions.

Methodology: The assessment process for the MA/MS program is as follows:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (direct–indirect, quantitative, and qualitative) are collected and returned to the program coordinator.
- (2) The program coordinator will analyze the data to determine whether students have met measurable outcomes.
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the program faculty.
- (4) Individual meetings will be held with faculty teaching core graduate courses (show cause) if required.
- (5) In consultation with the HS Advisory Committee, the Program Coordinator will propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period, and, where needed, curricula and program changes.

Note: The assessment for the Homeland Security Degree program utilizes four Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that outline what students will know, what they will be able to do, or what they will demonstrate upon completion of the program. Each course in the program aligns with a student's achievement of these learning outcomes. However, HS 5000, HS 5050, and HS 5200 are foundational courses that have been explicitly included in the first two SLOs due to their impact on a student's overall success in the program. The data from these courses are crucial for overall program design. Additionally, the targets for measures 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, and

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3.2 were revised to 80 and 85, respectively, to better align with low student course enrollment and the new administration's adjustments to DHS doctrine.

In addition, the Homeland Security degree program has completed its self-study and is implementing curricular and programmatic changes based on the findings to further support student success.

Student Learning Outcomes:

SLO 1. First and second-semester students will describe the historical evolution and context of early American domestic homeland security challenges from the establishment of the Department in 2002 through today's international and globalization challenges.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus objectives.

HS 5000: International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime, and Covert Ops (Foundational Course)

HS 5050: Homeland Security (Foundational Course)

HS 5650: International Security and Globalization (Support Course)

Measure 1.1. (Direct – knowledge)

On an annual basis, students enrolled in HS 5000 and HS 5050, required courses for HS Master's students, and HS 5650, a support course, will be administered course exams containing a series of questions taken from a question bank developed by a faculty committee designed to evaluate the student's basic knowledge and understanding of the foundational concepts, theories, strategies, and challenges of Homeland Security from early America through current international and globalization challenges. Eighty percent (80%) of enrolled students will demonstrate a basic understanding of the foundational concepts, theories, strategies, and challenges of Homeland Security from early America through current international and globalization challenges by scoring 80% or higher on the exams.

Findings: Target was Met.

Analysis: In Assessment Cycle (AC) 2024–2025, the target was met. Based on the analysis of those results it was apparent that students demonstrated weaker performance in content related to the intelligence function, particularly in their ability to identify and explain the six major factors currently transforming the intelligence enterprise. These factors include changes in the intelligence environment, shifts in intelligence customers, evolving intelligence requirements, increased strain on the current intelligence community structure, the expansion of analytic functions beyond the traditional intelligence community, and the evolution of intelligence into a broader, more diverse enterprise.

Based on this analysis, faculty implemented targeted instructional enhancements during AC 2024–2025 by expanding intelligence-related content from two lessons to four, each supported by scenario-based application exercises. These modifications strengthened both

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students' conceptual understanding and their ability to apply knowledge related to intelligence transformation.

Results confirmed measurable improvement. Students were better able to articulate and demonstrate how the six major factors are shaping the intelligence enterprise. However, assessment findings also revealed that students were not consistently able to explain that Homeland Security functions are not performed exclusively by the Department of Homeland Security, but rather are shared across federal, state, local, tribal, private-sector, nonprofit, and public stakeholders.

Based on these findings, faculty implemented additional actions in AC 2025–2026 to improve student learning. These actions included the incorporation of required readings emphasizing the distributed and multi-sector nature of Homeland Security, as well as the integration of weekly assignments and scenario-based exercises highlighting the roles of non-DHS federal agencies, state and local governments, the private sector, and the public. These efforts were designed to reinforce students' understanding of Homeland Security as a shared national mission rather than a single-agency responsibility.

As a result of these enhancements, the target for AC 2025–2026 was met. Students demonstrated improved ability to explain and contextualize the shared governance and operational responsibilities inherent in Homeland Security.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on analysis of AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following actions in AC 2026–2027 to continue the cycle of improvement. Instruction will place increased emphasis on students' ability to analyze and integrate local, state, and national capabilities within Homeland Security contexts. Faculty will incorporate additional instructional content focused on distinguishing the unique roles, missions, and capabilities at each level of governance. Enhanced readings and expanded scenario-based assignments will further support students in understanding how these capabilities can be effectively combined to respond to complex Homeland Security situations.

These actions are expected to further strengthen students' ability to integrate multi-level capabilities into comprehensive Homeland Security analyses, thereby sustaining continuous improvement in student learning outcomes.

Measure 1.2. (Direct – Skill / Ability)

Students will demonstrate their critical thinking and problem-solving skills through scenario-driven exercises that require them to analyze and develop a response to a homeland security situation. In their response, they must create a plan that contains relevant, justifiable, feasible, and actionable recommendations based on the information presented. Eighty (80%) of the students will score 13.6 (80%) or higher on the Critical Thinking – Problem-Solving Rubric (max is 16).

Findings: Target was Met.

Analysis: During AC 2024-2025, the target was met; however, rubric-level analysis indicated

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an average score of 12 out of 16, suggesting a need to strengthen students' ability to recognize and appropriately apply the Incident Command System as a component of the National Incident Management System. Faculty determined that students needed a more precise distinction between NIMS and ICS. The instruction was revised to emphasize that NIMS is the overarching national framework for multi-agency coordination during incidents. At the same time, ICS is the standardized on-scene management structure for directing and controlling tactical operations. Faculty also reinforced the shared standard for planning, communications, logistics, and financial functions across both frameworks.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following improvements in AC 2025-2026. Faculty expanded scenario-based exercises requiring students to distinguish roles and responsibilities between state and federal governments during disaster response. Students were required to describe the processes by which local, state, and federal disaster declarations are issued and to explain the types of assistance made available following those declarations. These changes were designed to improve students' applied understanding of emergency management authority, coordination, and intergovernmental responsibility.

As a result of these changes, the target for AC 2025-2026 was Met. These changes directly affected students' ability to analyze emergency response structures and develop coherent, policy-aligned response plans.

Decision: The target was Met in AC 2025-2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the continuous improvement of student learning. Faculty will place increased emphasis on students' ability to understand the broader operational picture of Homeland Security incident response. This includes a focused integration of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the role of the Incident Command System (ICS), and how these components function within the National Response Framework (NRF). Faculty will implement several targeted instructional strategies.

First, faculty will incorporate structured, scenario-based exercises that require students to apply NIMS and ICS principles within the context of the NRF. These scenarios will progressively increase in complexity and require students to identify command structures, delineate roles and responsibilities, and demonstrate how coordination occurs across multiple levels of government and sectors.

Second, faculty will integrate visual frameworks and organizational mapping assignments that help students conceptualize how NIMS, ICS, and NRF align. These activities will require students to illustrate command relationships, resource flows, and communication pathways during incident response operations.

Third, faculty will assign applied case studies (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, COVID-19 response, and large-scale natural disasters) that require students to analyze successes and gaps in coordination, command, and implementation of national frameworks. Students will be expected to evaluate how effectively NIMS and ICS were applied and how these systems supported—or failed to support—the NRF.

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This multilayered approach will strengthen students' ability to understand and apply the interconnected frameworks that guide Homeland Security incident response, thereby improving their capacity to analyze and operate within complex, multi-jurisdictional environments.

This approach will enhance students' ability to analyze, integrate, and apply the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Incident Command System (ICS), and the National Response Framework (NRF) within complex Homeland Security scenarios. Students will be better prepared to understand command relationships, coordinate multi-agency responses, and evaluate how national frameworks function collectively to support effective incident management across local, state, and federal levels.

SLO 2. Third-semester students will understand the roles and functions of the various agencies comprising DHS and the US intelligence community in assessing foreign, domestic, and cyber threats; the counterterrorism strategies used to thwart terrorist aggression; and the constitutional issues associated with these strategies.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus below.

HS 5100: Venue and Event Security
HS 5150: Domestic Terrorism Prevention and Analysis
HS 5300: Constitutional Issues and Global Security
HS 5400: Network Security and Cyberterrorism
HS 5750: Homeland Security Policy Seminar

Measure: 2.1. (Direct – knowledge)

On an annual basis, a sample number of research papers and projects from the courses above will be evaluated by a panel of faculty members using a standardized research paper rubric (attached). The research papers and/or projects will be assessed to determine if students can demonstrate a basic knowledge of fundamental principles of homeland security policy, domestic and international trends in terrorism, the evolving nature of cyberspace, and how homeland security-associated laws affect the operations of law enforcement and intelligence operations. At least 80% of the students sampled will score 90% or higher on the evaluation.

Findings: Target was Met.

Analysis: During the AC 2024-2025 assessment cycle, the target was met. More than 80 percent of students earned scores of 91% or higher, indicating improved student performance and understanding of the material. The instructional changes implemented had a positive impact on learning outcomes. Based on the analysis of the 2024–2025 results, faculty implemented targeted changes in the 2025–2026 academic year to continue the cycle of improvement in student learning. These changes included focusing on recent court opinions and applying those opinions to classroom assignments and discussions. Faculty also continued to integrate current political developments, global events, emerging technologies, and relevant trends into coursework to ensure students remained informed about Homeland Security issues.

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As a result of these changes, the target was met in AC 2025–2026. More than 80 percent of students earned scores of 92% or higher, demonstrating continued improvement in this area. Students were able to determine DHS involvement in a multitude of events, analyze events, and determine whether DHS was involved, even if that involvement was not made public. Students also demonstrated improved ability to apply legal and policy considerations to Homeland Security scenarios and situations.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the improvement cycle in student learning. Faculty will expand the use of current legal and policy-based scenarios that require students to apply recent court opinions, constitutional principles, and Homeland Security policies to DHS operations, terrorism prevention, intelligence activities, and cyber threat response. These scenarios will require students to identify applicable legal authorities, analyze limitations on government action, and explain how policy decisions are shaped by constitutional requirements.

These changes will improve students' ability to apply laws and policies to current DHS scenarios and situations.

Measure: 2.2. (Indirect – Attitude)

At the end of each semester, the program will sample students with a survey, which will state: "In my homeland security courses, I was provided a master's level of understanding of homeland security policy, strategy, threat assessment and trends, associated law and procedures, and how the various agencies interact across the spectrum of operations." Respondents will be able to respond strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. At least 85% of students will respond that they strongly agree or agree with the statement.

Findings: Target Met

Analysis: In AC 2024–2025, the target was met. Student participation levels met expectations, and ongoing opportunities for feedback were available following each term. Based on the analysis of the 2024–2025 results, faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025–2026 to support the continuous improvement process. All classes offered within the academic year were polled, and 100% of the program's students were offered at least one opportunity to provide feedback on their satisfaction with the program. Faculty reviewed student feedback related to course content, delivery, instruction, and overall academic experience. Faculty also continued to engage formally and informally with professionals in the field to determine current expectations regarding graduate-level skills and knowledge.

As a result of these changes, the target was met in AC 2025–2026, with 88% of students responding that they strongly agreed or agreed with the survey statement.

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Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the improvement cycle in student learning. Faculty will continue to administer course-level polls and will review feedback after each term to identify trends related to course content, delivery, instruction, and student satisfaction. Faculty will also use student feedback and input from professionals in the field to make informed adjustments to course materials and instructional approaches.

These changes will improve students' academic experience regarding course delivery, content, and instruction. The process ensures students continue to have opportunities to share feedback and recommend improvements, supporting both the educational experience and the program's relevance to real-world applications in the Homeland Security field.

SLO 3. Fourth-semester students will demonstrate that they understand the current policies and procedures to mitigate, prevent, and respond to a disaster, analyze and implement safety and risk reduction regimens, the ethics of care and compassionate leadership, and the mechanisms for measuring all-hazards, threats, and recovery.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus below.

HS 5050: Homeland Security

HS 5200: Research Design and Methods in Homeland Security

HS 5350: Executive Leadership, Diplomacy, and Ethics in Homeland Security

HS 5500: Counterterrorism, Intel Analysis, and Advanced Criminal Investigations

HS 5550: Advanced Cyber-forensics and Cyberwarfare Issues

HS 5600: Managing Chaotic Organizations

HS 5700: Peace Studies, Conflict Transformation, and Global Security

Measure 3.1. (Direct – Knowledge / Ability)

At the end of their fourth semester, students will be given scenarios assessing their knowledge and ability to conduct risk assessments, implement mitigation measures, navigate leadership challenges, and know the foundational concepts of the all-hazards approach to the emergency management process through scenario-driven exercises. Eighty percent (80%) of enrolled students will score (80%) or higher on a battery of questions demonstrating an ability to conduct risk assessments, implement mitigation measures, navigate leadership challenges, and know the foundational concepts of the all-hazards approach to the emergency management process.

Findings: Target was Met.

Analysis. During Assessment Cycle (AC) 2024-2025, the target was met, with 86% of students scoring 80% or higher. Results indicated that students demonstrated competency in conducting risk assessments, implementing mitigation strategies, navigating leadership challenges, and understanding the foundational principles of the all-hazards approach to emergency management.

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Based on the analysis of these results, students were unable to consistently explain the relative strengths and limitations of social media and traditional media in providing timely, accurate, and reliable information in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. This gap was identified as a critical area for improvement due to the increasing role of information management and public communication in emergency response and recovery operations.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, faculty implemented targeted instructional changes in AC 2025-2026 to sustain the improvement cycle in student learning. Through additional readings and expanded scenario-based exercises, students were exposed to the strengths and weaknesses of both social and traditional media, with particular emphasis on credibility, speed, misinformation, audience reach, and coordination with emergency management authorities.

As a result of these changes, the target for AC 2025-2026 was met. These changes directly affected students' ability to analyze and evaluate information dissemination methods and to assess the media's role in supporting or hindering emergency management operations.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to further advance the improvement cycle in student learning.

Faculty will incorporate advanced, scenario-based assignments that require students to operate in real-time information environments where both social media and traditional media streams must be monitored, analyzed, and evaluated simultaneously. These exercises will emphasize identifying misinformation, assessing source credibility, and determining appropriate communication strategies during the initial phases of an incident.

Faculty will integrate applied assignments that require students to develop and evaluate crisis communication plans, including the effective use of social media platforms in coordination with traditional media outlets. These assignments will focus on message development, timing, audience targeting, and alignment with emergency management authorities and protocols.

Faculty will also incorporate case studies of recent disasters and crisis events in which students must assess the performance of both social and traditional media. Students will evaluate how information dissemination influenced public behavior, operational decision-making, and overall incident outcomes.

As a result of these changes students will be able to critically evaluate, compare, and integrate social and traditional media strategies in emergency management contexts. Students will be better prepared to assess the credibility, timeliness, and reliability of information; identify and mitigate misinformation; and develop effective, coordinated communication strategies that support decision-making and public safety during disaster response and recovery operations.

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Measure 3.2. (Direct – Skill / Ability)

Two or more faculty members will review position paper submissions by students using the Critical Thinking – Problem-Solving Rubric (16 points) (attached), in which they must analyze and respond to some aspects of Homeland Security, Policy, Strategy, or Leadership. The paper requires all students to demonstrate the capacity to critically analyze information objectively and to develop, assess, determine, compile, and select a potential solution that best supports their position. At least 85% of the evaluated projects, papers, and presentations will score 85% (14.4/16) or higher.

Findings: Target was Met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met. During AC 2024-2025, the success criterion was met. Faculty required students to identify and explain the primary distinctions between crime and terrorism across multiple scenarios. Students were also presented with ambiguous cases in which the classification of an incident as a crime or terrorism was debated, including the 2017 Las Vegas shooting. Students analyzed each case and determined whether the incident met the criteria of a terrorist act, supporting their conclusions with evidence and reasoning.

Results indicated that students demonstrated strong analytical skills in distinguishing between crime and terrorism and in applying definitional and conceptual frameworks to complex scenarios.

Based on the AC 2024-2025 analysis, faculty implemented instructional enhancements in AC 2025-2026 to extend students' analytical skills. Faculty-developed scenarios illustrate how critical infrastructure can pose risks due to factors such as poor or misguided land-use planning, inappropriate construction materials, flawed design, climate change impacts, urbanization, geographic remoteness, or regulatory constraints.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was Met. Students demonstrated strong analytical skills. However, students were less successful at explaining how critical infrastructure can pose significant risks even in the absence of a triggering disaster.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to continue the improvement cycle in student learning.

Faculty will place increased emphasis on students' ability to analyze and explain how critical infrastructure systems can present inherent and latent risks independent of a specific triggering event. Instruction will incorporate scenario-based and systems-thinking approaches that require students to examine infrastructure interdependence, cascading effects, and vulnerabilities embedded in design, policy, and environmental conditions.

Faculty will introduce applied assignments that require students to assess critical infrastructure sectors through a risk lens, identifying vulnerabilities related to planning,

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design, location, and regulatory frameworks. These assignments will also require students to propose mitigation strategies that address these risks before a disruptive event occurs.

Faculty will incorporate scenarios that highlight how seemingly stable systems can fail due to accumulated vulnerabilities, emphasizing the importance of proactive risk management and resilience planning.

These actions will allow students to analyze and identify systemic vulnerabilities and latent risks within critical infrastructure, even in the absence of a triggering event. Students will be better prepared to evaluate interdependencies, anticipate cascading effects, and develop proactive mitigation strategies that enhance resilience and support effective risk management across complex systems.

SLO 4. Students will demonstrate proficiency in evaluating and analyzing Homeland Security research and being able to frame their research questions.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus below.

HS 5200: Research Design and Methods in Homeland Security

HS 5900: Graduate Seminar for Thesis Research and Writing Methods in HS.

Measure 4.1. (Direct – Knowledge)

Eighty-five percent (85%) of students taking the comprehensive examination will demonstrate proficiency on Part I of the exam, which requires students to analyze and critique three foundational and standardized questions.

The evaluation is based on a skill assessment Comprehensive Exam Rubric (attached). The rubric consists of five skill assessment areas, which faculty use to grade the exam using a score from zero (low proficiency/fail) to three (Accomplished proficiency). A combined score of 30 (minimum of 10 points per question) and above on the rubric will demonstrate student proficiency on this part of the comprehensive exam. The Graduate Program Coordinator evaluates and reports scores. Students need a minimum score of 20 (10 points per question) to pass the two remaining questions focused on their specific areas of interest.

Findings: Target Met

Analysis: In 2024–2025, the target was met. All students successfully passed the examination; however, opportunities for continued improvement were identified. Faculty evaluated methods for integrating exam questions that address current Homeland Security priorities, including border protection. Although plans were in place to revise the comprehensive exam during the 2024–2025 cycle to include emerging focus areas, such as diversity within Homeland Security doctrine, the changing landscape of security and immigration law, the growth of White Nationalism, and the rise of disinformation and domestic terrorism, these updates were not implemented as intended. Despite this, student outcomes reflected strong overall performance.

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Based on the analysis of the 2024–2025 results, faculty updated the comprehensive exam during AC 2025–2026 to better reflect current professional trends, changes in Homeland Security doctrine, and curriculum updates made within the program. Faculty also identified the need for a more structured process for reviewing and revising comprehensive exam questions.

As a result of these changes, the target was met in AC 2025–2026, with 95% of students demonstrating proficiency on the comprehensive examination.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the improvement cycle in student learning. The short plan of action for the comprehensive exam will include a faculty review of the existing comprehensive exam questions, revision of outdated or duplicative questions, alignment of exam prompts with current curriculum and professional issues, and a post-exam review of student performance by question. Faculty will ensure that the comprehensive exam reflects current and relevant information that not only addresses changes within the profession but also reflects changes made to the program curriculum.

These changes will improve students' ability to apply knowledge gained within the academic program to relevant scenarios and questions that cover material from their studies within the Homeland Security Program.

Measure 4.2. (Direct - Knowledge)

Ninety percent (90%) of thesis and non-thesis proposals will demonstrate student proficiency in developing research questions about political-security phenomena that directly relate to and expand upon an existing theoretical body of knowledge.

Committee members will score the proposal at the end of each thesis and non-thesis proposal using the Thesis – Non-Thesis Assessment Rubric (see attachment). The rubric consists of twelve skill assessment items, which the thesis committee members will score from low to high proficiency. A cumulative score of 125 or more will demonstrate mastery.

Findings: Target Met

Analysis: In 2024–2025, the target was met. An analysis of the 2024–2025 results guided the implementation of multiple improvements in 2025–2026 aimed at strengthening student learning outcomes. Faculty worked collaboratively to evaluate and update assessment rubrics to promote accurate and consistent measurement of student performance. The twelve assessed skills were reviewed to confirm alignment with both course-level and program-level outcomes. In addition, course content and assignments in courses 5200 and 5900 were systematically reviewed and adjusted to ensure that learning objectives at the course level directly support the broader program outcomes.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025–2026, the target was met, with 92% of thesis and non-thesis proposals demonstrating student proficiency in developing research questions.

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Students demonstrated proficiency in developing research questions that directly relate to political-security phenomena and expand upon an existing theoretical body of knowledge. However, faculty identified the need to provide students with more structured guidance as they refine research topics into focused, manageable, and meaningful research questions.

Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the improvement cycle in student learning. The short plan of action for guiding students will include earlier faculty feedback on research topics, structured checkpoints in HS 5200 and HS 5900, examples of effective thesis and non-thesis research questions, and targeted guidance on connecting research questions to the current Homeland Security environment. Faculty will also emphasize mentoring students to formulate research questions that contribute meaningful insights or practical solutions to contemporary challenges facing the profession.

These changes are designed to deepen students' understanding of the Homeland Security field's challenges and equip them with strategies to address those issues effectively. As a result, students will develop a professional portfolio that includes relevant, field-specific research, preparing them to contribute meaningfully to their current or future professional roles.

Measure 4.3. (Direct - Knowledge)

Ninety percent (90%) of student theses and or non-thesis papers will use the most appropriate methodology for the research question/hypotheses addressed. At the end of each thesis, Paper-in-Lieu, or Project, committee members will score the submission utilizing the Thesis – Non-Thesis Assessment Rubric (see attachment). The rubric consists of twelve skill assessment items, which the thesis committee members will score from low proficiency to highly proficient. A score of 125 or higher will demonstrate proficiency. The Program Coordinator will evaluate and report scores.

Findings: Target Met

Analysis: The target was met during the 2024–2025 cycle. Review of the 2024–2025 assessment data informed several instructional updates implemented in 2025–2026 to promote continued program improvement. Greater emphasis was placed on research methodology and the effective application of research within the Homeland Security curriculum. Faculty introduced new learning resources and targeted assignments designed to guide students in selecting appropriate research methods for different problem sets. These updates strengthened students' applied research skills and supported the program's ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.

As a result of these changes, the target was met in AC 2025–2026, with 93% of student theses and non-thesis papers demonstrating appropriate methodology alignment with the research question or hypothesis. Students demonstrated proficiency in selecting methodologies aligned with their research questions or hypotheses in thesis and non-thesis work.

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Decision: The target was met in AC 2025–2026.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2025–2026 results, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026–2027 to advance the improvement cycle in student learning. Faculty will continue to emphasize selecting and applying appropriate research methodologies to examine current Homeland Security issues effectively. Faculty will also require students to justify methodology choices in relation to their research questions, available data, and intended research outcomes.

These changes are intended to enhance students' understanding of contemporary issues within the Homeland Security field. In addition, faculty will continue mentoring students to connect methodology decisions with real-world issues, ensuring that their research remains relevant and responsive to developments within the Homeland Security profession.

Comprehensive Summary of Key Evidence of Improvement Based on Analysis of

Results. The following reflects all changes implemented to drive continuous improvement in AC 2025-2026. These changes are based on insights gained from analyzing the AC 2024-2025 results and lessons learned.

- **SLO 1. Measure 1.1.** The faculty added readings that illustrate how other agencies and the public support Homeland Security's functions. In addition, weekly assignments included (to be added to readings and scenarios that reflect the complexity of Homeland Security and the various roles that departments, agencies, and the public play in providing support.
- **SLO 1. Measure 1.2.** Faculty expanded scenarios requiring students to describe the differences in roles and functions between the state and federal governments. The scenarios required students to describe the process by which the president, governor, and/or chiefs issue a disaster declaration and to explain the process for, and the types of, assistance available upon that declaration. These changes will improve students' understanding of the emergency declaration process and the division of responsibilities between the state and federal governments.
- **SLO 2. Measure 2.1.** Faculty focused on recent court opinions and applied those opinions to classroom assignments and discussions. Faculty also continued to incorporate timely political developments, global events, emerging issues, and technologies into course content to keep students informed of evolving Homeland Security challenges. These efforts enhanced students' capacity to evaluate real-world situations, recognize the Department of Homeland Security's role, and apply relevant laws and policies within Homeland Security frameworks. Moving forward, faculty will expand the use of legal and policy-based scenarios requiring students to apply recent court opinions, constitutional principles, and Homeland Security policies to DHS operations, terrorism prevention, intelligence activities, and cyber threat response.
- **SLO 2. Measure 2.2.** Faculty offered all students at least one opportunity to provide feedback on their satisfaction with the program during the academic year. Structured polling mechanisms were used within courses to systematically collect student feedback

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on program content, instructional effectiveness, course delivery, and overall satisfaction. Faculty also consulted with professionals working in the field to better understand current workforce expectations. Information gathered from both students and practitioners informed targeted adjustments to course materials and instructional approaches. Moving forward, faculty will continue administering course-level polls and reviewing feedback after each term to support continuous improvement and ensure course content remains aligned with the evolving needs of the Homeland Security field.

- **SLO 3. Measure 3.1.** Through additional readings and scenarios, faculty exposed students to the strengths and weaknesses of social and traditional media in providing timely and accurate information in the aftermath of a disaster.
- **SLO 3. Measure 3.2.** Faculty-developed scenarios illustrate how critical infrastructure can pose risks through poor or misguided land-use planning, inappropriate construction materials, inappropriate design, climate change, urbanization, remoteness, or regulatory constraints, among other factors.
- **SLO 4. Measure 4.1.** Faculty continued reviewing the comprehensive examination to evaluate its alignment with contemporary Homeland Security trends, changes in professional practice, and curriculum updates within the program. The review process reinforced the need to incorporate emerging topics such as evolving security law, immigration issues, disinformation, domestic terrorism, and changes in Homeland Security doctrine into future assessments. Moving forward, the comprehensive exam will be revised through a short plan of action that includes faculty review of existing questions, revision of outdated or duplicative questions, alignment of prompts with current curriculum and professional issues, and post-exam review of student performance by question.
- **SLO 4. Measure 4.2.** Faculty conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the thesis and non-thesis assessment rubrics to confirm consistency and alignment with course-level and program-level outcomes. As part of this process, the twelve assessed skill areas were reviewed, and course content and assignments in key courses were refined to better support student learning. Moving forward, faculty will place greater emphasis on guiding students in the development of research questions that address the current Homeland Security environment and contribute practical, relevant solutions to ongoing challenges. The short plan of action will include earlier faculty feedback, structured checkpoints in HS 5200 and HS 5900, examples of effective research questions, and targeted mentoring to help students refine topics into focused and meaningful research questions.
- **SLO 4. Measure 4.3.** Faculty strengthened the emphasis on research methodology by updating curriculum resources and designing targeted assignments to help students select and apply appropriate methods across diverse Homeland Security contexts. These enhancements improved students' applied research skills. As the program continues to evolve, faculty will sustain this focus by mentoring students to align methodological decisions with research questions, available data, and real-world challenges, ensuring their research remains relevant and responsive to developments within the Homeland Security field.

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Plan of Action Moving Forward

- Student learning outcomes continue to guide the design and delivery of instruction to support student achievement. While the assessment process remains ongoing, it is important to acknowledge that academic program assessments may have been impacted, with the extent varying by program. Nonetheless, the University's commitment to providing high-quality educational and experiential learning opportunities remains evident, as reflected in continued enrollment growth despite challenging circumstances.
- Looking ahead to AC 2026-2027, and in keeping with our continuous improvement model, faculty have enacted significant changes in the admission process to align admissions criteria with indicators of academic success. Assessment findings have shown that students admitted provisionally often demonstrate the skills and qualities necessary to thrive in a graduate program. Faculty will continue to monitor the progress of these cohorts through ongoing assessment to ensure that the revised process supports student achievement and program outcomes.
- Changes to student learning outcomes will primarily focus on refining target scores and the expected percentage of students meeting those benchmarks. Based on current and historical data, faculty believe the existing outcomes effectively capture the most essential areas for student success. As part of the continuous improvement model, faculty will continue administering course-level surveys to gather feedback and ensure student learning goals are achieved.

The online Master of Science in Homeland Security program completed the University's first virtual academic program review/self-study. The evaluation confirms that the program is built on a strong academic foundation, including a flexible degree structure, practitioner-informed instruction, a well-established culture of assessment and continuous improvement, and a curriculum aligned with recognized homeland security standards and workforce expectations. The review also identified several areas where the program can strengthen documentation, transparency, and external visibility. In response, the program has developed a plan of action addressing the formalization of an advisory board, the creation of a competency mapping matrix tied to external standards, the systematic collection of student and alumni success stories, expanded strategic marketing efforts, improvements related to public posting of syllabi, clarification of experiential learning requirements, and selected course-level revisions involving syllabus documentation, shell integrity, and textbook currency.

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Dimension Assessed	Accomplished 4	Proficient 3	Developing 2	Beginning 1
(Inquire) Identify and define key issue/s and/or problem/s	Clearly, accurately, and appropriately identifies key issue/s and/or problem/s.	Identifies most or all key issue/s and/or problem/s. Some minor inaccuracies or omissions may be present, but do not interfere with meaning.	Identifies some key issue/s and/or problem/s. May have some inaccuracies, omissions or errors present that interfere with meaning	Most or all key issues/ and/or problem/s are not identified or defined or are identified or defined inaccurately. Meaning is unclear.
(Analyze) Present and Analyze Data/ Information	Presents appropriate, sufficient, and credible data/information. Clearly analyzes information for accuracy, relevance, and validity. Information clearly relates to meaning.	Presents sufficient and appropriate data/information. Generally, analyzes data/information for accuracy, relevance, and validity. Minor inaccuracies or omissions do not interfere with analysis or meaning.	Presents some appropriate data/information. May miss or ignore relevant data /information. Analysis is limited or somewhat inappropriate. May contain inaccuracies or omissions that interfere with analysis and/or meaning.	Does not present relevant and appropriate data/information. Fails to analyze or uses inaccurate or inappropriate analysis of data/information. Copies information without analysis.
(Evaluate) Apply a Multi-Dimensional approach/ Consider context	Clearly applies a multi- dimensional approach. Synthesizes various perspectives. Acknowledges limits of position or context.	Acknowledges multiple approaches. Some synthesis of perspectives. May not fully acknowledge limits of position or context but is aware of limits or context.	Somewhat simplified position with some sense of multiple approaches. Minor or vague synthesis of perspectives. Some acknowledgement position may have limits. May not acknowledge context.	Student's position is grounded in a singular, often personal perspective. Position may be simplistic and obvious. Little or no awareness that position may have limits or context.
(Solve)	Reasoning is logical	Reasoning is mostly	Reasoning contains	Reasoning is

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Demonstrate Sound Reasoning and Conclusions	and creative, consistent, complete, and often unique. Conclusion is complex and/or detailed, well supported, complete, relevant	logical, complete, and consistent. Demonstrates some unique or creative insight. Conclusion is generally complete, supported, and mostly consistent and relevant	elements of logic and/or creative insight, but not fully resolved. May have minor inconsistencies or omissions. Conclusion is relevant but abbreviated or simplified, not fully supported, and/or contains minor	illogical, simplistic, inconsistent, or absent. Conclusion is simplistic and stated as an absolute, or inconsistent with evidence or reasoning. Lack of coherent or clear conclusion.
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