Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan for the Field of Global Development

February 10, 2012

This assessment plan is written on the presumption that the merger of the fields of International Development and International Agriculture & Rural Development is approved as currently submitted.

It is important to understand that the IARD/ID programs are not only interdisciplinary in nature but are explicitly multidisciplinary in the sense that they include students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds who come to Cornell to concentrate their studies in a diverse set of graduate fields. Originally conceived as a degree for mid-career professionals who needed to fill “holes” in their previous academic preparation, the MPS degree continues to serve this role while also catering to younger professionals looking for agricultural or development assistance training in virtually every department in CALS as well as some in other colleges. This makes it virtually impossible to specify one set of learning goals or outcomes in the same sense that an individual discipline could. Nevertheless, there are some explicit outcomes at a somewhat more abstract level that have been identified and which are listed below:

- Acquire knowledge to solve and assess critical real world problems
- Hone technical skills and capabilities through technical tools, subject matter, and laboratory and/or field studies to enhance problem solving abilities related to fields of interest
- Think across disciplines (socioeconomic and biophysical) using a system perspective
- Understand global and local perspectives and issues that impact society
- Acquire skills to monitor and evaluate projects
- Improve oral and written communication skills, including the ability to write project and funding proposals, and to effectively present project outputs using a variety of media

Given the wide diversity in disciplinary focus of our students, ranging from Economics to Agronomy, to Extension Education, among many others, a great deal of the responsibility for ensuring that the above goals are met falls on the committee chairs who supervise students’ course selections and project papers. In order to maintain an adequate level of oversight and ability to assess, the new Field of Global Development will be implementing the attached “Guidelines for Advisors and Students” over the next academic year.

In addition, the field will continue its weekly seminar for MPS students (IARD 5990) which has the specific purpose of ensuring that they progress in their project paper through the development of a proposal and outline of their topic. The students are led through the process of developing a prospectus, literature review and outline. They develop their ability to perform these tasks through presentation and critique at each phase. This process is supplemented with a variety of presentations on related topics such as research resources at Cornell, survey technique, data sources, etc.
In the future, we are planning to assess our outcomes in achieving the above objectives in several ways:

*Direct Measures*

These measures have a bearing on all six of the criteria listed above. In particular, course selection has a major impact on points 1, 3, 4 and 5. Performance in the weekly MPS seminar (IARD 5990) will provide opportunities for assessing points 2 and 6.

- Based on the newly instituted tracking of grad student progress (see attached guidelines for students and advisors), we will be able to assess their course selections and time-to-degree more systematically than in the past.

- We will also track student job placement after graduation

- Advisors should also be able to assess student outcomes as part of the routine reporting requirements outlined in the guidelines.

- Performance in the weekly MPS seminar (IARD 5990) will enable a direct evaluation of both the ability to identify methods and techniques to analyze issues of interest as well as oral and written communication skills.

*Indirect Measures*

Students themselves are perhaps the best source of information on how well they are achieving the goals laid out above as well as being able to suggest ways to improve the program.

- As part of our merger and field restructuring process we have done a survey of graduate students. We intend to continue doing this in the future as it has provided useful input to our 5990 seminar. Most notably this year we are instituting a course segment on job search and placement, something identified by grad students as important

*Annual Assessments*

We are planning annual meetings of all chairs of graduating MPS students to present the results of grad student surveys as well as the information collected as part of the newly instituted structure of reporting outlined in the guidelines attached to this plan. While the specific outcome singled out for discussion in each year is somewhat flexible, it will be most useful in our first year to discuss any issues that may arise from the implementation of our new merged fields and reporting requirements for students and advisors.