F.A.Q. about new Assessment Plan for the Field of Soil and Crop Sciences

Why do we need an Assessment Plan now?
The Middle States Association has recommended that the Graduate School should work to improve our assessment practices. The Graduate School mandated that all Graduate Fields have an Assessment Plan in place by Jan 1, 2012.

Will this plan change the degree requirements for our students?
No, all student requirements will remain the same.

Are we changing the expectations for our students, or the way in which we assess degree progress?
No. At the Graduate Level we will continue to assess student performance through coursework, annual committee meetings, oral exams (A exam, B exam, or thesis exam), seminars, and thesis/dissertation.

So what is changing?
There are two changes you will notice. First, we are introducing an ‘Assessment form’ that we will use to record student performance in oral exams (A exam, B, exam, thesis exam). Second, we are introducing a ‘Committee Meeting Report’ that will be completed during annual committee meetings. The ‘Committee Meeting Report’ form will replace the Annual Report that students currently file with the Field.

What is the goal of the Assessment Plan?
The Plan seeks: 1) make a clear statement of what we expect from our students, 2) describe our methods for assessing student learning. A major goal is to help the Field improve our teaching practices over time.

When will the Assessment Plan take effect?
We will begin implementing the plan at the start of the Spring semester, 2012.

How will the Oral Exam Assessment Form be used?
The student will bring this form to the oral exam. Immediately following the exam, the Chair will complete the form based on feedback from committee members. The committee will discuss their assessment with the student, all parties will sign, and the student will submit the form to the Field.

How will the Committee Meeting Report be used?
The student will bring this form to their annual committee meetings. The student will complete the various sections of the form, summarizing the information that is discussed during the meeting. The form will be signed by the committee members and student and submitted to the graduate field assistant. This form will replace the Annual Student Reports that students have previously filed with the Field.

What process was used to come up with these changes?
The Graduate School provided workshops and guidance on generating an effective Assessment Plan. The DGS prepared the plan in consultation with Field Faculty. The plan was revised following feedback from Field Faculty and Graduate Students. The plan was approved at the annual meeting of the Field Faculty in December, 2011.

Where can I learn more?
The Assessment Plan, the oral exam Assessment Form, and the Committee Meeting Report will all be made available on the Soil and Crop Sciences Graduate Program Website (http://css.cals.cornell.edu/cals/css/graduate). For more information you can also contact the DGS (dbuckley@cornell.edu) or GFA (mn15@cornell.edu).