

Emory Master’s in Development Practice
Learning Outcomes Assessment Report 2021-2023
Learning Outcomes Plan 2023-2025

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MDP Program Overview

Emory MDP is a two-year degree program that prepares students for careers as global development and humanitarian professionals. Our curriculum combines rigorous, cross-disciplinary coursework with skill training and practicum experiences with a diversity of partner organizations. Grounded in a contextual understanding of sustainable development, Emory MDP produces innovative and committed professionals who can operate at multiple scales including global, national, and local levels. The most common factors mentioned by students when explaining why they decided to join Emory MDP are:

- **Two summer field practicums** (8-10 weeks each) in the Global South or the United States, with basic practicum expenses covered by the MDP program and/or host organization;
- **Academic-year internships** within leading development organizations based in Atlanta, most of which are paid;
- **Limited cohort size** (15-18 students) enabling highly interactive learning and personalized mentoring;
- **Access to courses across Emory schools and** university and school rankings;
- **Interdisciplinary, flexible curriculum customized to individual interests** through coursework and field experiences;
- **Critical thinking and contextual understanding** of development practice.

The MDP Program is a professional degree. However, we have found that the critical applied development lens that we provide to students is a key component of their subsequent career success. Therefore, MDP focuses on two fronts:

1. Assessing students' integration of theoretical approaches to and understandings of development; and
2. Measuring student's acquisition of technical skills that contribute to students' ability to secure interesting and fulfilling employment opportunities.

Executive Summary

During the 2021-2023 cycle, Emory MDP focused on four learning goals, each assessed through at least two methods. Results from the assessments of these learning goals follow.

To complete the assessments, MDP program staff and faculty compiled multiple forms of data (syllabi, papers, student listening sessions, final project presentations, reflective essays, and course evaluations) from across the MDP curriculum.

Assessments of the 2021-2023 learning outcomes revealed that the MDP program effectively equips students to 1) think critically as development practitioners, 2) to demonstrate intellectual creativity and flexibility in conducting research, monitoring and evaluations, 3) to engage in teamwork constructively and to contribute to collaborative efforts, 4) to express ideas clearly and convincingly in interpersonal and in public situations, and 5) to be mindful of the ethical and political issues that arise while doing field research or other programmatic work.

Over the course of the past two years, course evaluations were discussed with core faculty in order to incorporate students' feedback into curriculum planning and to increase student's acquisition of practical skills. MDP made particular strides in the re-design of several core courses, particularly MDP 506: Research Methods I, MDP 517: Research Methods II, MDP 510: Gender and Development, and MDP 585: Special Topics. This re-design led to several new initiatives, including:

- The formal approval of the option to complete U.S.-based practicums (which were piloted during the pandemic) responded to student interest in and commitment to development “at home” as well as trends within the development sector that focus on “decolonization” (more details under summary for Learning Goal 1)
- The creation of a new two-semester project that enhances program monitoring and evaluation by having current students conduct interviews with alumni and then analyze those interviews for dual pedagogical learning and program improvement (more details under summary for Learning Goal 2)
- The implementation of an orientation resume workshop as well as 1-credit courses in professional development and grant writing to student career-readiness (more details under summary for Learning Goal 3)
- The re-design of the MDP Mentors Program in summer 2021 to focus on pairing students with alumni and other practitioners rather than academic mentors (more details under summer for Learning Goal 3)

In Fall 2022 and Spring 2023, the MDP program also implemented three formal curriculum revisions approved by the Laney Graduate School Executive Council. Each of these revisions impact student learning outcomes in directions deemed favorable during the 2021-2023 period. The revisions resulted in the following changes (more details for each are provided under the associated Detailed Learning Outcome Assessment):

- Revision 1: Approved student's ability to complete summer field practicums based in the U.S. as well as abroad (related to Learning Goal 1);
- Revision 2: Changed requirements for the Research and Applied Methods Competency Area to allow for 3 credits of student choice (related to Learning Goal 4);
- Revision 3: Formalized MDP-created concentrations into registrar-approved subplans that will appear on student transcripts (related to Learning Goal 3).

Additional details for each learning goal are included in later sections of this assessment.

2023-2025 Learning Goals

In summer 2023, the MDP Program Team has embarked on a strategic planning process that will continue to influence learning assessments moving forward. However, the results of the past two years suggest that the four Learning Goals developed in 2021-2023 plan will continue to serve MDP students in the 2023-2025 timeframe. These respond to student assessments of program strengths and opportunities for improvement expressed in 2021 and 2022.

During the upcoming Learning Outcome Assessment Term, MDP will continue to focus on specific student skills and professionalization, particularly strengthening quantitative learning

possibilities within the program. Though we will maintain the goals from 2021-2023, several of the assessment methods have been updated.

In particular, during the 2023-2025 period, MDP faculty and staff will pilot the creation of a portfolio tracking system, through which students will identify specific assignments as tied to skills that they are acquiring. Learning Assessment Goals for 2021-2023 and 2023-2025 are listed below for comparison. The relevant Assessment Outcomes below include plans for the upcoming cycle. The updated assessment measures are listed in the final table of this report.

Table 1. 2021-2023 and 2023-2025 Learning Goals Comparison

2021-2023 Learning Goals	2023-2025 Learning Goals
1. Students will be able to use critical self-reflection to analyze attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and biases, how they are formed, and how they affect decisions and assessments of options, resources, costs, and impacts.	1. Students will be able to use critical reflection to analyze attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and biases, how they are formed, and how they affect decisions and assessments of options, resources, costs, and impacts.
2. Students will be able to apply logical, evidence-based approaches to project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to synthesize relevant information into a portfolio of logical and cohesive deliverables.	2. Students will be able to apply logical, evidence-based approaches to project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to synthesize relevant information into a portfolio of logical and cohesive deliverables.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate increased professionalism in their career strategies and materials.	3. Students will be able to demonstrate increased professionalism in their career strategies and materials.
4. Students will demonstrate skills in qualitative and quantitative data collection and data analysis.	4. Students will demonstrate skills in qualitative and quantitative data collection and data analysis.

2021-2023 Detailed Learning Outcomes Assessment

Learning Goal 1

Students will use critical reflection to analyze attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and biases, how they are formed, and how they affect decisions and assessments of options, resources, costs, and impacts.

Findings for 2021-2023

During the 2021-2023 term, used three assessment methods were used to evaluate this Learning Goal. Results of each are reviewed below.

MDP 500 and 511 Written assignments

The core course series for MDP includes *MDP 500: Foundations of Development*, *MDP 507: Field Seminar 1 Development in Context* and *MDP 511: Post-Field Seminar*. Across these courses, students are presented with ample opportunity to develop their capacity to identify relationships between approaches to problems, proposed solutions, and evaluations of those solutions. Through these courses, students demonstrated capacity for critical self-reflection related to their positionality as development practitioners through term papers and class discussions. This was particularly apparent in *MDP 500: Foundations of Development*, which focuses on the history of development and development theory. Student are encouraged to engage varied course materials (including more videos and podcasts and more diverse authors) in creative ways (like through meme creation and creative writing). Through pedagogical exercises, students learn to identify their own positionality as well as that of the scholars and practitioners with whose thinking they engage. One student comment from the Fall 2022 course evaluation stated that:

"I appreciated the different theorists we covered and have a great appreciation for the different lenses and perspectives we can use to analyze things. I enjoyed reading work from non-Western theorists... I also enjoyed the discussion posts and thought they were a great way for people to share their perspectives and/or experiences with the rest of class."

In *MDP 507: Development in Context*, students undertook discussion posts specifically designed to provoke critical self-reflection. Student feedback aided in the creation of new outlets for student engagement, including a compendium of student-recommended related material. In *MDP 511*, students engage with development practitioners about their work. Students reflected in 2021 that, *"The course has a strong foundation on applying development into practice, it helped and showed the different organizational burdens that we will be facing in our professional careers."*

Within cohorts, the diversity of students who join the program shapes students approaches to development. In 2022, MDP welcomed the most diverse cohort in its history, with 80% women and including natives or citizens of 10 countries. This aligns with the program history within which Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) average between 30% and 50% of each cohort. This and other factors contribute to MDP students' commitments to understanding positionality particularly as connected to racial identities, class affiliation, gender and sexual orientation, and faith in development. MDP courses developed to address such issues, including *MDP 585: Decolonizing Development*, *MDP 514: Elements of Advocacy* and *MDP 585: Identity, Development and Social Change*, continue to be offered, taken by the majority of students and

favorably reviewed. Student exit interviews supported the continuation of this learning stream within MDP.

The Action Plan for 2021-2023 including continuing to refine core course assignments to develop these skillsets. Assessments of student's written work and course evaluations show that this learning outcome is being met.

MDP 506 and 517 Alumni Interview and Analysis Projects

In 2021, MDP launched a two-semester project crossing MDP 506: Research Methods I and MDP 517: Research Methods II. In the first semester, current students conducted conducting semi-structured interviews with alumni. In the second semester, students drew on the dataset created through those interviews to learn qualitative data analysis techniques. Their final project is to present an analysis to the MDP team including recommendations. In final presentations in both years, students reflected positively on the iterative learning process inherent in this assignment. The assignment was also improved between 2021 and 2022 with further integration of the two course instructors to connect the processes of research design and analysis.

Student Exit Interviews

In 2021, 13 students completed exit interviews and in 2022, 7 did. Though MDP had planned to include an assessment of these learning objectives as part of the Exit Interview, this has been moved to the Action Plan for 2023-2025.

Through these exit interviews, the majority of students commented that the MDP program influenced their understanding of development and of organizations engaged in development work. In addition, student assessments of the MDP program suggested that they feel confident as translators able to identify tradeoffs between different types of initiatives. Students reported feeling strongly able to use qualitative methods to understand power dynamics that shape development outcomes.

Students continued to express a desire for more quantitative training and development economics courses to enhance their competency particularly as related to costs of various development interventions. MDP continues to work with other departments and the university to increase access to the desired training.

Additional Assessments Completed

As pandemic travel restrictions lifted, the MDP program was able to resume sending some student's abroad for field practicums. About half of MDP students to opt for U.S.-based summer field practicums in 2021 and 2022. Student reflections on these activities, monitored through a web-portal in summer 2021, showed student ability to reflect on the relationships between their own and others' positions and their impacts on development initiatives. These changes coupled with contributed to MDP's increased focus on connecting process of development and specific initiatives in the Global North and Global South through the curriculum.

We found all student groups to be successful at designing and delivering strong project proposals using an appropriate mix of the methods introduced in coursework. Project papers were well-formulated and logical, and revealed students' attention to issues of feasibility, ethics, burden placed on the organization or its constituency, etc. Final papers for MDP 511

demonstrated a high level of understanding and ability to address challenges that students encountered in their field practicums by synthesizing relevant contextual information.

During this period, numerous core MDP course assignments were rethought to focus on the development of a portfolio of deliverables that demonstrate student abilities related to this objective. MDP 510 was re-designed to include a practitioner co-instructor and deliverables were rethought to increase professional development opportunities. Through both the Non-Profit Management course and Research Methods, students worked in teams with organizations to develop action plans that address concrete challenges facing non-profit partners. Deliverables and supervisor assessments from student field practicums and local internships also revealed student’s ability to successfully contribute to systematic analysis and reporting on projects. This was further evidenced by the publication of various student’s findings from their summer field practicum during this assessment period.

Action Plan for 2023-2025

- The learning objective for 2023-2025 has been amended to remove “self” from reflection, in order to better capture the processes inherent in identifying the relationships between diverse stakeholders approaches to development and the solutions that they pursue;
- MDP will include a Learning Outcome survey as part of the graduation packet through which students reflect on this and other learning outcomes;
- Continue to work with LGS, QTM, the Economics department to develop curriculum that expands students access to development approaches currently underrepresented in the program.

Learning Goal 2

Students will apply logical, evidence-based approaches to project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and synthesize relevant information into a portfolio of logical and cohesive deliverables.

Findings for 2021-2023

This section reviews the two assessment methods used to evaluate this Learning Goal in 2021-2023.

Portfolio of Materials produced in MDP 505, 506, 510 and 517

Through several of MDP’s core courses, students generate deliverables that form part of a portfolio of development products. The program has a long history of designing course materials in this way. However, during the 2021-2023 term, several of these course deliverables were re-designed to increase their utility to students as sample work products. These include the following:

Table 2. Redesigned MDP Assignments for Professional Portfolio

Course	Assignment	Description
MDP 505: Monitoring and Evaluation	Varied Assignments	Through this course, MDP students develop monitoring and evaluation plans for a project of their choice. Assignments include identifying process and outcome indicators, creating logical frameworks, and formal evaluation proposals

MDP 506: Research Methods I	Qualitative Data Collection Plan	In collaboration with partner organizations, MDP students work in teams in this course to create a qualitative data collection plan that serves the needs of the partner. Through this, they apply research methodologies, iterate on their understandings, and end with an actionable presentation and report that the partner can act on.
MDP 507: Field Seminar I	Fieldwork Context Analysis	In preparation for their summer placements, students conduct a context analysis that includes historical, political, sociocultural and economic background. The assignment includes stakeholder identification, the triangulation of information across varied data sources including grey and peer-reviewed literature.
MDP 510: Gender and Development	Secondary Gender Analysis and Implementation Plan	Through this assignment, students explore gendered dimensions of an internship or practicum experience, regardless of the explicit focus of that project on gender. As such, students perform a gender analysis and propose activities that apply course learning to real world activities.
MDP 517: Research Methods II	Program Evaluation	Using qualitative data analysis, students generate actionable recommendations to improve the MDP program. Students must synthesize interview data and their own experiences in generating these recommendations.

These assignments form the basis of an MDP Deliverables Portfolio that the program staff is in the process of developing. The formalization of this portfolio will be an assessment method for 2023-2025. This approach to course assignment design is contributing to student learning and preparation for the workforce. In 2022, exit interviews, several students commented on using these assignments as talking points in interviews.

Review of Student Internship Deliverables and Supervisor Evaluations

Student deliverables for their internships during this period showed high quality products, several of which contributed to relevant grey literature or academic publications. For instance, in 2021, one student who worked with CARE USA’s knowledge management team contributed to a widely cited and professional report that received a great deal of media attention, [The True Cost of Delivering COVID Vaccines: South Sudan](#). Student deliverables are regularly praised and utilized by partner organizations.

Most students are highly rated according to their supervisors (78% of spring 2023 internship supervisors graded the student performance at an A-level, and all received a B grade or higher). Many students showed a high level of proficiency in public speaking and ability to tailor their communications to a wide variety of audiences. Most students were rated as better than expected in terms of their having the necessary technical knowledge, professional skills, and cultural context to excel in their internships. Following graduation, several students were retained by their host organization as consultants or employees.

Action Plan for 2021-2023

- Assess and formalize student portfolio assignments, particularly from MDP 505, 506, 507, 510 and 517, into a document that students are able to review;
- Continue the collection of student internship deliverables and supervisor evaluations.

Learning Goal 3

Students will demonstrate increased professionalism in their career strategies and materials.

Findings for 2021-2023

MDP planned to utilize three methods to assess this learning goal. Over the course of the term of the report, two of the assessment methods were useful, one was adjusted. The program also offers support on a fourth assessment method, MDP Alumni Career Tracking, as a complement to the planned assessments, and has included the outcomes of this assessment as well.

Percentage of students receiving highest reviews in internship supervisor evaluations

During the 2022-2023, academic year, students completed 37 academic year internships. In addition, three students worked full-time with organizations. One student transitioned from an internship in Fall 2022 to a full-time position with the same organization during Spring 2023, prior to graduation.

Student assessments by their supervisors showed that they had necessary technical knowledge, professional skills and cultural competence to excel in internships. In Spring 2022 and 2023, 93% of students were recommended to receive an A or A-, and the remaining 7% were all recommended to receive a B or B+. We will continue to track these assessments by supervisors moving forward.

Student self-reviews of presentations in MDP 500 compared to MDP 511

MDP did not track student self-reviews in MDP 511 during this period. However, in Fall 2021, students were required to submit one presentation as a video, and to provide a self-assessment of that presentation. While many students reflected that watching their own presentations was challenging, approximately half said that watching their own presentations was a great learning opportunity. In Fall 2022, students participated in a new, peer-feedback exercise on their presentations in MDP 500. Students worked in groups of three to provide each other with constructive feedback to improve their second in class presentation. Qualitative assessments and review of these assignments revealed that while students found the process cumbersome, reviewing their own and other's presentations contributed to their ability to improve their presentation skills.

Student assessments of MDP-provided professional development support

MDP put increased focus on students' career readiness during the 2021 to 2023 academic years. Following the successful delivery of a resume workshop to some students during the academic year 2021-2022, the workshop was a mandatory part of orientation in Fall 2022. 94% of students participated. Student assessments stated that this 3-hours as some of the most impactful of orientation. According to the MDP Program Director, this workshop also exponentially increased the professionalism and legibility of student participants' resumes.

In Spring 2023, MDP's resume workshop instructor also offered a 1-credit, 4 week Professional Development Seminar. Students rated the instructors teaching in this course as a 4.875/5, and the overall course quality as 4.6/5. One student's comment speaks to the utility of this course: *"Great deliverables that is practical for what we are doing currently and related to jobs that we want to do. It forced me to take initiative to apply to jobs and tailor my submissions accordingly. It engaged me in ways that was fully useful for me."*

MDP also continues to provide all students and recent graduates with a “career account” which allows them enhanced access to resources on the [DEVEX website](#), the world largest portal for development professionals.

Other Assessments:

MDP Alumni Career Tracking

In addition, as of May 2023, 88% of members of the class of 2022 are employed in development-related spaces. These examples demonstrate the impact of MDP career readiness training on student outcomes. Employers include globally-focused agencies such as the [CDC ORISE Fellowship Program](#), the [CDC Foundation](#), the [Task Force for Global Health](#), and [Acumen](#), as well as consulting firms like [Frontier Design](#) and [Booz Allen Hamilton](#). Others focused on social, economic, and environmental justice in the US, an area of increasing interest to our students. These include [Common Future](#), [Ignited Word](#), and the [Partnership for Southern Equity](#). These employment numbers suggest that students have received the necessary supports and training to secure jobs quickly after graduation.

Overall, 93.6% of MDP alumni were confirmed to be employed according to MDP’s alumni employment tracking, with 85.5% employed in development and related fields (including education and healthcare fields). Almost half (47%) of the MDP alums work in non-profits, and the rest distributed more or less equally across government/public agencies, consulting firms, universities, and private sector.

In addition, two MDP alumni were selected among Emory’s 40 Under 40 award recipients, one in the Class of 2021 and one in the Class of 2022. MDP students were also recognized with the 2022 and 2023 LGS Outstanding Master’s Students award. Students’ input into nominations also led to MDP Associate Director being selected as 2022 LGS Exemplary Mentor, and Assistant Director for Academics and Operations as 2023 LGS Outstanding Program Administrator. Such outcomes support MDP’s positive assessment of Learning Goal 3.

Utilization of Newly-Approved MDP Concentrations

As mentioned above, MDP received approval from the LGS Executive Council to formalize concentrations tracked by the program into registrar-recognized subplans that will appear on student transcripts. For 2023-2025, we also plan to report on the number of students completing these new concentrations. Across the classes of 2021, 2022 and 2023, 38 students completed 62 concentrations. We hope to maintain or increase the average number of concentrations per enrolled student during the upcoming learning outcomes assessment term.

Action Plan for 2023-2025

- Continue to track assessments of students by supervisors in academic year internships;
- Change assessment method for this learning objective to focus on student presentation reflections in MDP 500;
- Continue with current Professional Development training and support options with experienced external consultants;
- Track students completing new subplans to be reflected on their transcripts (as part of the approved MDP curriculum revision);
- Annually update the Alumni Career Tracking sheet to document student professional development.

Learning Goal 4

Students will demonstrate skills in qualitative and quantitative data collection and data analysis.

Findings for 2021-2023

During this assessment term, MDP redesigned the two required Research Methods courses, MDP 506 and 517, to improve outcomes related to this learning goal. One area for improvement noted during this period is the persistent need to expand partnerships that support MDP students' acquisition of quantitative skills. While several efforts were made during the period to expand these offerings, the 2023-2025 period provides opportunity to bring these options to fruition.

Quality of Analyses Conducted in MDP 517 and Grades on Assignments in MDP 506

In order to increase the hard skills development afforded to MDP students through the program's research methods courses, both the required classes were re-designed for Fall 2021. This led to the following changes:

- MDP 506: Research Methods I for Fall 2021 was re-worked to increase students' opportunity to practice various research methodologies. The re-designed syllabus includes conducting observations and creating field notes, student's conducting oral history interviews with each other, interviews with MDP alumni, and the creation of an implementable qualitative data collection plan for a partner organization.
- MDP 517: Research Methods II was re-designed to focus on increasing student mastery of qualitative data analysis software as a tool for analysis, building their skills. The new course includes data cleaning, transcription, increased identification of independent and dependent descriptors and variables, and both structural and analytical coding. Student projects draw on datasets that they create in MDP 506 and result in actionable recommendations for the MDP program.

The re-design of both courses contributed substantially to improved learning outcomes by students. Student grades in MDP 506 remained an A average over both years, suggesting strong mastery of qualitative research methods. In 2022 and 2023, student teams submitted their analyses to the MDP program to help with program strategy. The quality of these analyses improved over the two years and has led to plans to co-author op-eds with students about the MDP program.

MDP acknowledges a continued deficit in the program's quantitative training for students. While several students each year enroll in BIOSTATS and other advanced statistical methods, many MDP students require a more basic course in data literacy and basic statistics. MDP is currently working with LGS and the QTM department to either 1) allow MDP students to enroll in an undergraduate section of QTM 100 or 2) to create a graduate section of this course.

In addition, MDP promoted student's use of Emory library resources on data analysis, bibliography management software, Intro to R, and data visualization. In addition, MDP completed a curriculum revision that expands the courses that students can use to complete their Research and Applied Methods competency. This change will allow students to better account for the varied methods training that they are able to receive from across university departments.

Student Exit Interviews

Student exit interviews in 2022 reflected student's experience of increased comfort with rigorous qualitative methods. MDP Faculty reviewed practicum and local internship deliverables that required familiarity with development tools and datasets. In these outputs, students learn to use applied statistical tools for quantitative analysis, and to conduct mixed methods qualitative assessment for various indicators related to the field of development.

However, the need to offer this training is reflected in student exit interviews, and to some extent in supervisor evaluations of student internships. A greater focus on developing these skills is part of updated Learning Objective 4 for the 2023-2025 assessment period.

Action Plan for 2023-2025

- Continue to engage with MDP 506 and 517 course instructors and to evaluate student projects;
- Offer a quantitative reasoning course to MDP students by Fall 2024;
- Review student exit interviews and course evaluations for research methods series to assess student comfort with qualitative and quantitative methods.

Table 3. 2023-2025 Learning Assessment Methods Plan

Learning Goal	Assessment Methods	Frequency
<p>1. Students will use critical reflection to analyze attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and biases, how they are formed, and how they affect decisions and assessments of options, resources, costs, and impacts.</p>	MDP 500 and MDP 511 written assignments	Weekly, Compiled Annually
	MDP 506 and MDP 517 alumni semi-structured interviews and analysis	Annual
	Student Exit Interviews and First Year Feedback Session	Annual
<p>2. Students will apply logical, evidence-based approaches to project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and synthesize relevant information into a portfolio of logical and cohesive deliverables.</p>	Portfolio of materials produced in MDP 505, 507, 510 and 517	Annual
	Review of student internship deliverables	Annual
<p>3. Students will demonstrate increased professionalism in their career strategies and materials.</p>	Percentage of students receiving highest reviews in internship supervisor evaluations	Semester
	Percentage of students employed in related sectors according to the MDP Alumni Career Tracking Document	Fall
	Student assessments of MDP-provided professional development support	Each event
	Student assessments of presentation skills in MDP 500	Fall
	Number of students completing newly approved subplans	Annual