

## **The Department of Political Science**

### **Yearly Assessment Activity for the Year 2014-2015**

**Mission:** The mission of the Political Science Department is to help our students develop an understanding of the structures and operations of politics and power so that they can become engaged and critical thinkers. Our research and course offerings range from local to global, from theory to policy, from the state to the grassroots. Through our intellectually diverse curriculum, students acquire the research, writing, and reading skills necessary to think and act in the world.

**Learning Objectives:** To achieve this, the department enumerated six learning objectives, three content-based objectives and three skills objectives. Every instructor is required to embed course learning objectives and outcomes in their syllabus. A review of spring 2014 syllabi shows that 84 percent of undergraduate sections and 90 percent of graduate sections included learning outcomes. (See appendix for course mapping.)

***Goal 1: Political Concepts and Content:*** To help students understand the nature of political phenomena and political inquiry in varied historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts

*Object 1:* Recognize and explain key political concepts (such as “power,” ideology, the state).

*Objective 2:* Explain political phenomena critically logically, and through multiple theoretical lenses. Students will be able to recognize and explain multiple theories that shape the discipline of political science and structures of power in applied settings.

*Objective 3:* Identify and explain the workings of key political institutions, actors, movements, and political events across the discipline of political science and in applied settings.

***Goal 2: Research Analytical and Argumentation Skills:*** To teach students the skills involved in political inquiry and expression via intensive reading, close textual analysis and discussion.

*Object 1:* Identify and summarize the main arguments of scholarly sources and assess the credibility of competing arguments, including those that use basic statistics, across the discipline of political science.

*Objective 2:* Conduct a piece of research that combines interpretation and application of political sciences theories and uses at least one social science method informed by knowledge of the method’s strengths and weaknesses students will articulate a clear research question, assemble a bibliography, and use citations in accordance with conventions in the discipline of political science.

*Objective 3:* Express basic political ideas or theories, in writing and orally, using a clear thesis statement, a well-organized argument, and appropriate evidence.

At the graduate level, we expect that students completing a master's program in political science will demonstrate

1. Familiarity with the theories and concepts that shape the discipline of political science (i.e. urban politics for the UPA and international affairs in the IA), which students are able to use to explain political phenomena critically in identifying, summarizing, and evaluating the main arguments of scholarly sources.
2. Critical and creative writing skills demonstrated through the appropriate and effective usage of supportive evidence and logic in crafting a compelling argument
3. Familiarity with a variety of methods used by political scientists to investigate politics, which students can use to conduct empirical research by themselves.

**Program Assessment:** Over the past decade, the political science department has worked to strengthen student mastery of these objectives by implementing a series of a required course sequence and new course options. In the past three years, we have embarked on a substantial undergraduate curriculum reform to make our major more writing-intensive and build the kind of critical analysis skills to prepare our students to go on to law school and graduate school.

In order to evaluate the success of these curricular changes, at the undergraduate level, for the past two years, the department has done a program-level assessment, creating an assessment rubric for the senior capstone seminar to see how our students are doing by the time they graduate. The capstone seminar (PS 4000W) is the culminating course of the major, and students are required to complete a research paper, pulling together the skills they have learned across the major. In addition, for indirect assessment, we surveyed seniors in the capstone seminar using a Likert-scale questionnaire to ascertain how much they feel they have learned in the major. At the graduate level, over the past three years, we have standardized the comprehensive exam so now all masters students are required to take a comprehensive exam, which similarly provides a measure of how we are doing program-wide.

We began this program-wide assessment in spring of 2014, crafting a 6-part rubric and assessing three sections of the capstone seminar in spring 2014 and four sections of the seminar in school year 2014-2015. To ensure a fair and comprehensive picture, we thus assessed 7 sections to see how the program was doing.

The culminating task for that course is a research paper where students put together six key skills we have focused on over the course of the major. As communicated to our students, the goal of the paper is to "Conduct a piece of research that combines interpretation and application of political sciences theories and uses at least one social science method informed by knowledge of the method's strengths and weaknesses. Students will articulate a clear research question or thesis statement, assemble a bibliography, and use citations in accordance with conventions in

the discipline of political science.” Overall, over 78% of the papers exceeded or met expectations on all six objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Our program assessment thus focused on assessing how students did on these key areas. In a nutshell for our program-wide assessment for 2014-2015 using seven sections (see appendix for the rubric we developed and specific rubric breakdowns):

- **83%** of students met or exceeded expectations in formulating a research question
- **81%** of students met or exceeded expectations in employing a social science suitable to the question
- **82%** of students met or exceeded our expectations for using appropriate concepts, theories or literature
- **83%** of students met or exceeded our expectations presented evidence accompanied by thoughtful analysis.
- **79%** of students met or exceeded expectations for clear, grammatical writing and well-articulated prose.
- **78%** of students met or exceeded expectations in their ability to use citations well.

Graduate assessment has been more straightforward. Students are required to pass a comprehensive exam, which provides a direct measure of the content related goals, in order to graduate. Graduate deputies work with instructors to make sure their syllabus will prepare them for the exams and the comprehensive exam questions are written to encapsulate these objectives.



### **Indirect Assessment:**

We also surveyed seniors in the seminar on how much they felt like they had learned. Students surveyed also overwhelmingly (over 90%) felt like they had mastered the key concepts and skills in the major (see attached on Likert questionnaire).

### **Learning Outcomes Assessment Status Rubric**

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<sup>1</sup> The department noted that the rubric was not able to account for the different expectations that each instructor had for the research paper. This issue was taken up at a faculty meeting but it was decided that to have a central committee do the assessment would not necessarily make it more accurate given the content expectations of the particular course/instructor and would create significantly more work for those faculty, when there is no college support for this work. Assessing multiple sections was a way to get a broader picture

 Program	 Element	Assessment Plans	Learning Goals and/or Outcomes	Syllabi	Assessment Tools	Use of Assessment Results
BA		4	4	3.4*	3.5	3
MA – International Affairs		3	4	3.6	3.0	3
MA – Urban Policy and Administration		3	4	3.6	3.0	3

We completed this chart for our self study. On a scale of 4, we looked at all the syllabi in political science for learning outcomes to judge progress on syllabi (and the percent that included learning outcomes); and for assessment tools, on which rubrics have been developed. We split up the graduate programs (even though for now they are at similar levels) because they are administered differently and have different classes/requirements.

### **Assessment Going Forward:**

In sum, over the last three years at the undergraduate level, our department has put an assessment plan in place and began to implement it. This is a tremendous improvement over our previous practice, which had dwindled to nothing since released time for assessment activities was cut by the administration.

The results of our program assessment over the past two years, along with our self study and report of the external evaluators, have lead us to believe our curriculum reform is on the right track. The vast majority of our majors have met our expectations for these learning objectives. Through curricular reforms put in place over the past three years, we hope over time to have the vast majority exceed our expectations, and nearly all majors meet our expectations. Many of the students in these capstone seminars in 2014 and 2015 did not get the full benefit of the new complement of writing- intensive courses and so we hope with these now in place, our program-wide performance will continue to improve.

### **Assessment Plan for 2015-2018:**

Over the next three years we will assess key building blocks of the major, assessing multiple sections of the same course each year to get a more comprehensive and accurate picture In the

third year, we will again assess the program to ensure we remain on the right track, ideally even stronger.

## **2015 - 2018**

### Direct Assessment

<b>Year</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Course / Sections</b>	<b>Tool</b>
2015-2016	2.1	3012W, 3190W, 3191W, 3290W, 3390W, 3391W, 3392W, 3393W, 3490W, and/or 3491W	2.1 Rubric
2016-2017	2.2	3014W	2.2 Rubric

2017-2018	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1,2.2, 2.3	4000W	Six-Objective Rubric (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
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### Indirect Assessment

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Course / Sections</b>	<b>Tool</b>
Spring 2016 Spring 2017 Spring 2018	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	4000W	Survey, Likert scale, listing learning objectives and asking how well they learned the following: Indirect expression of what students think they learned

Thus in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, we will assess key building blocks of the major. In 2017-2018, we will again assess the capstone seminar (PS 4000W) and all six learning objectives to gauge our program-wide performance.

For the graduate programs, the comprehensive exams work well for content-related goals, but more work needs to be done in developing assessment tools for skill-related goals.