

Department of Political Science BA Assessment
Academic Year 2009-2010

Introduction

Last year the Department of Political Science completed a year long process of restructuring our mission statement, student learning outcomes and assessment tools. The development of our assessment program has been difficult due to the nature of our discipline. Our program involves exposing our students to the full discipline of Political Science: we have seven subfields and offer courses in each of these every semester. Our students are required to take three courses in one subfield and to take one course in three other, separate subfields so that they acquire breadth and depth in Political Science. We have four required courses and will conduct our assessments based on work performed in these. Two of our required courses, American National Government and Politics and Fundamentals of Politics, introduce students to the major concepts of the discipline. A third course, Scope and Methods in Political Science helps students to develop their critical thinking skills through conducting a quantitative research project and writing their findings in a comprehensive research paper, a key student learning outcome for our program. In this process students also demonstrate three of our student learning outcomes: to apply principles and generalizations to evaluate political problems and situations; to synthesize and integrate information and ideas; to draw reasonable inferences and observations. This course is taken mid-way through the students' program and serves as a good measure of progress for all students, regardless of the subfield in which each specializes. Finally, our Capstone course helps students to develop policy positions by analyzing a public policy, including the history and fiscal components of the policy, and then recommending changes along with assessing the political risk involved should law makers or administrators adopt the suggested changes. Students must submit a written paper and publicly present their work. Through this process students are able to again demonstrate their progress with four of our learning outcomes, stated above.

Program's Mission:

The mission of the Department of Political Science is to communicate the knowledge of political science as a scholarly discipline through education of undergraduate and graduate students in the core principles and specialties of political science, to engage in critical research and scholastic inquiry and to apply the knowledge of Political science to serve the needs of the state of West Virginia and the nation.

The Political Science program fulfills the mission of the College of Liberal Arts through

- providing courses that form the core of the undergraduate curriculum for all Marshall students so that they may think critically and imaginatively, communicate effectively, and understanding the dimensions of human experience.
- providing specialized instruction for undergraduate and graduate students that enable them to develop intellectual and moral abilities so that they may live autonomous, sensitive, productive lives.

The Political Science program fulfills the mission of the University by

- providing opportunities for students to use their knowledge, creativity, and critical

- thinking skills to make their communities better places in which to live;
- providing opportunities for students to examine critically the many issues facing society and, through the process of civil discourse, prepare themselves to become socially responsible individuals who contribute to the betterment of society;
- enabling students to appreciate and to cultivate diversity, and to value differences;
- educating a citizenry capable of living and working effectively in a global environment; and
- furthering the intellectual, artistic and cultural life of the community and region.

I. Program's Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the BA in Political Science, students will develop higher-order thinking skills, academic success skills, discipline-specific knowledge and skills and liberal arts and academic values. To demonstrate this, students will:

1. Apply principles and generalizations to evaluate political problems and situations.
2. Synthesize and integrate information and ideas.
3. Draw reasonable inferences and observations.
4. Identify major concepts in Political Science.
5. Demonstrate critical thinking skills by comparing, contrasting, analyzing and evaluating major political science methods, concepts and theories.
6. Appropriately use technology to find and/or disseminate information central to Political Science.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

II. Assessment Activities

During this period we assessed learning outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 6, listed above.

A. Assessment Measures (Tools)

Outcome 1: Apply principles and generalizations to evaluate political problems and situations. To measure this outcome we will use grades for the final paper in PSC 211, Scope and Methods, in which students statistically test hypotheses and evaluate their findings. We will also use the final paper grade for PSC 499, Capstone, in which students present their findings and make recommendations for policy changes based on their study.

Outcome 2: Synthesize and integrate information and ideas. To measure this outcome we have used the grades from an extensive literature review conducted by students in the 211 course. For this exercise students are to review a minimum of 25 studies over the past two decades that address causal changes in their dependent variable of study.

Outcome 3: Draw reasonable inferences and observations. To measure this outcome we have used two grades, one for the final paper in 211, in which students write and test hypotheses drawn from the results of their literature review and then analyze the results of the regressions. We also use the final grade for the 499 paper, in which students make policy recommendations based on an extensive analysis.

Outcome 6: Appropriately use technology to find and/or disseminate information

central to Political Science. To measure this outcome we use the final grade on the 211 paper. Students must find research for the literature review component of the paper using electronic scholarly databases. Students also must learn and use SPSS statistical software in order to test their hypotheses. In these two ways students demonstrate whether they have met the outcome.

B. Benchmarks

We set a benchmark to have 90% of our students earn an A or B on the assignment used as an assessment measure.

C. Results/Analysis

Students in the Capstone course more than exceeded the benchmark set. Students in 211 did not meet the benchmark: 76% earned an A or B on the literature review, but only 66% earned an A or B on the final paper.

D. Analysis/Planned Action

Our next step must be to record the grades for the individual components of these assignments. Because we did not do this, we can only use whole grades. Therefore our analysis is flawed, because some of the students may have indeed met the learning outcome but earned lower grades because of missing components of the assignment, while others may be earning credit in the analysis for meeting the outcome when, in fact, it may be that they completed other components of the assignment well and that their grade reflects something other than meeting the learning outcome.

The other planned action is that it appears that more time and new strategies need to be taken in PSC 211 to help students meet the learning outcomes. This course next year will eliminate some of the exercises that may detract from the learning outcomes (such as external article analysis) in order to focus more time on the core goals of the course.

III. Overview of changes implemented in your program this past year based on results and planned action specified in last year's report.

Based on the report from 2008-09, our department undertook a year long process to write our mission statement and to come up with concrete learning outcomes. We worked to devise a plan that would measure these and found that, due to the many subfield specializations we have, we would have systematic data only through measuring assignments and various grades in the required courses of the major. Our department worked throughout the year with the Director of Assessment to make certain that our new assessment plan would meet the necessary criteria.

IV. Specify any changes/modifications made to your program based specifically on data obtained during Assessment Day Activities.

Our Assessment Day surveys yielded two criticisms: first, that students felt they did not know all the faculty and staff in the department; second, that at least two courses

per subfield should be offered each semester. We have acted on each criticism in the following ways:

- At the beginning of the fall semester we held a pizza party for all Political Science majors. During the event, we introduced the faculty and staff as well as other key figures we thought the students might enjoy getting to know. These people included the dean, the college academic advisor, the forensics and debate team director, the president of Pi Sigma Alpha, the political science honorary, and the presidents of the Young Democrats, College Republicans and College Libertarians. We will hold a similar event at the beginning of the Spring semester as well.
- We have developed a rotation schedule such that all departmental courses are offered every two years. In each semester at least two courses per subfield will be offered.

Assistance Needed with Assessment: What assistance can the Office of Assessment give you to help improve your assessment program?

As soon as possible, we would like to have feedback on this report so that we can make corrective steps to improve next year's report. We have two years until our next five year review and we would like to have two good cycles of assessment under our new learning outcomes as we work toward the next review.

Marshall University
Assessment of Program's Student Learning Outcomes for the Department of Political Science Program
BA
[2009-10]

Not every student learning outcome must be assessed every year. However, it is expected that at least one-fourth of the outcomes will be assessed each year, allowing for assessment of all outcomes within a four-year cycle. It also is important to use more than one assessment measure for each outcome.

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Year evaluated	Assessment Measures (Tools)	Benchmarks	Results	Analysis/ Planned Actions
1. Apply principles and generalizations to evaluate political problems and situations.	2009 /10	Final Paper in 211; Final Paper in 499	90% should earn A or B	66% of the students in 211 and 96% of the students in 499 earned an A or B on this assignment	Our analysis needs to be more carefully planned with recorded grades in the specific rubric areas of these assignments.
2. Synthesize and integrate information and ideas.	2009 /10	Literature Review in 211	90% should earn A or B	76% of the students in 211 earned an A or B on this assignment	More time needs to be spent in 211 to help students master the skills needed to meet these outcomes.
3. Draw reasonable inferences and observations.	2009 /10	Final Paper in 211; Final Paper in 499	90% should earn A or B	66 % of the students in 211 and 96% of the students in 499 earned an A or B on this assignment	See above.
4. Identify major concepts in Political Science.	2010 /11				

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Year evaluated	Assessment Measures (Tools)	Benchmarks	Results	Analysis/ Planned Actions
5. Demonstrate critical thinking skills by comparing, contrasting, analyzing and evaluating major political science methods, concepts and theories.	2010 /11				
6. Appropriately use technology to find and/or disseminate information central to Political Science.	2009 /10	Final Paper in 211 – Literature Review and Statistical Components	90% should earn A or B	66% of the students earned an A or B on this assignment	See above.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.	2010 /11				