

**Department of Political Science MA 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 four subfields in our graduate program and offer courses in each of these every semester. Our students are required to take four courses in one major field and to take three courses in a minor field, with three remaining courses for electives so that they acquire breadth and depth in Political Science. We have two required courses, PSC 600, Research Design, and PSC 604, Data Analysis. We will conduct our assessments based on work performed in these courses as well as students' comprehensive exams or theses. In this way we will have systematic data upon which to assess and improve our program.

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 graduate program fulfills the mission of the College of Liberal Arts through

- providing specialized instruction for 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 undertake intensive graduate-level education in their chosen fields upon admission to graduate school, giving them solid foundations for becoming competent professionals.
- 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 MA in Political Science, students will develop higher-order thinking skills, academic success skills, discipline-specific knowledge and skills and liberal arts and academic values. Students will:

1. Produce work illustrating quantitative and or qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation and application.
2. Demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge concerning significant issues, theories and concepts in Political Science.
3. Critically apply knowledge concerning concepts, theories and issues in Political Science to political phenomena.
4. Communicate effectively both in oral and written formats in the field of Political science, demonstrating mastery of methodologies, concepts and theories.

II. Assessment Activities

During this period we assessed learning outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 4, listed above.

A. Assessment Measures (Tools)

Outcome 1: Produce work illustrating quantitative and or qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation and application. To measure this outcome we will use grades for the final paper in PSC 600, Research Design, in which students produce a literature review and research design. We will also use the final paper grade for PSC 604, Data Analysis, in which students produce a quantitative research paper using a database they have constructed in SPSS software.

Outcome 2: Demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge concerning significant issues theories and concepts in Political Science. To measure this outcome we have used student performance on the comprehensive exams. Each exam is tailored to the student's major and minor concentrations in the discipline and asks questions which require that the student demonstrate mastery in this learning outcome.

Outcome 3: Critically apply knowledge concerning concepts, theories and issues in Political Science to political phenomena. To assess this outcome we will use the final paper grade for PSC 604, in which students must demonstrate their mastery of these outcomes through writing a literature review, testing hypotheses that emerge from that literature review and analyzing the results of their statistical test.

Outcome 4: Communicate effectively both in oral and written formats in the field of Political science, demonstrating mastery of methodologies, concepts and theories. We will use the comprehensive exams students take as these exams are tailored for each student's major and minor concentrations in the discipline.

B. Benchmarks

We set a benchmark to have 90% of our students earn an A or B on the assignments used as assessment measures. We have set a 90% benchmark of pass for the comprehensive exams we're using as assessment measures.

C. Results/Analysis

Students did not meet our benchmarks on the comprehensive exams, 600 papers or 604 papers. While 7 out of 8 (87.5%) met the benchmark for PSC 604, only 67% (4 out of 6) earned an A or B on the 600 paper. In the end, 87.5% (7 out of 8) of our students passed the comprehensive exams, but two of these students were only conditionally passed pending re-writes of parts of their exams. Overall, we are nearly meeting our goal. It is also true that our benchmarks are set rather high. That said, our graduate students as a whole are not performing at the level that we want them to be.

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.

We also need to meet with our graduate students as they begin the program to clearly explain our expectations for their performance and to encourage them to work more diligently to meet these goals.

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.

Last year no graduate students participated in our Assessment Day activities. We have a "town hall" meeting, inviting all students to participate. This year we will have a formal meeting with graduate students only, separating our activities for graduate and undergraduate students, to better assess our program.

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. Produce work illustrating quantitative and or qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation and application.	2009 /10	Final paper in PSC 600, Research Design, and final paper for PSC 604, Data Analysis	90% should earn A or B	67% (4 out of 6) of the students earned an A or B on their final 600 paper; 87.5% (7 out of 8) students earned an A or B on their final 604 paper.	Our analysis needs to be more carefully planned with recorded grades in the specific rubric areas of these assignments.
2. Demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge concerning significant issues theories and concepts in Political Science.	2009 /10	Written and Oral Comprehensive Exams	90% should pass	87.5%, or 7 out of 8 passed; but only 62.5%, or 5 out of 8, passed on the first round.	We need to clarify expectations for our students at the beginning of their program so that they will better prepare for comprehensive exams.
3. Critically apply knowledge concerning concepts, theories and issues in Political Science to political phenomena.	2009 /10	Final paper grade in PSC 604, Data Analysis	90% should earn A or B	67% (4 out of 6) of the students earned an A or B on their final 600 paper; 87.5% (7 out of 8) students earned an A or B on their final 604 paper.	Our analysis needs to be more carefully planned with recorded grades in the specific rubric areas of these assignments.

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Year evaluated	Assessment Measures (Tools)	Benchmarks	Results	Analysis/ Planned Actions
4. Communicate effectively both in oral and written formats in the field of Political science, demonstrating mastery of methodologies, concepts and theories.	2009 /10	Written and Oral Comprehensive Exams	90% should pass	87.5%, or 7 out of 8 passed; but only 62.5%, or 5 out of 8, passed on the first round.	We need to clarify expectations for our students at the beginning of their program so that they will better prepare for comprehensive exams.