05-06 Assessment Reports

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Department : Government

Mission :

Outcome : As in our last assessment, the Government Department Student Assessment Committee focused on the assessment of student writing skills. We evaluated student performance according to five criteria: 1) information acquisition, 2) conceptual thinking, 3) analysis of relationships and theories, 4) application of evidence, and 5) presentation of ideas.

Description : The Assessment Committee asked eight government faculty members to each submit three randomly selected papers from their upper-division courses (GOVT 119d, 130, 136, 140, 147, 154, 155, 157, 170). This produced a set of 24 papers. Instructor and student names were removed to ensure anonymity. The committee met to read and discuss three of the papers to ensure that we were using relatively similar standards in evaluating papers. We then randomly distributed the papers among ourselves, so that each committee member had a manageable set of papers to evaluate. We evaluated the papers according to the above five criteria, using a four-point scale (1=lowest, 4=highest). In each category each paper was judged as either 1) inadequate, 2) needing work/showing promise, 3) meeting requirements/showing competency, or 4) excellent work.

Date and Time :

Result: 1. Information Acquisition: Average paper score: 3.1 out of 4 Our students appear to be doing a reasonably good job in collecting and documenting various sources of information used in writing their papers, including both assigned reading and outside material. Many students rely too heavily on Internet sources. Our students need to diversify their sources by making wider and better use of library resources, including both books and journals. 2. Conceptual Thinking: Average paper score: 2.7 out of 4 Some paper assignments required more conceptual elaboration than others, but all assignments required students to draw links between theory and evidence of one kind or another, a task that proved difficult for many students. Most of the papers showed significant difficulties in employing concepts to illuminate and categorize whatever evidence the student had collected. As a result, many of the papers were closer to book reports or historical narratives than critical assessments of a particular issue or event. Many students were able to summarize the basic features of different explanatory approaches or conceptual frameworks, but few were capable of critically comparing them. In some cases, moreover, it was clear that students had not fully understood the concepts they were using. 3. Analysis of Relationships and Theories: Average paper score: 2.5 Most papers were able to summarize relevant theories and their associated concepts and underlying assumptions, but few were successful in critically employing theories to make their own arguments. 4. Application of Evidence: Average paper score: 3.0 Whether the assignment requires independent library research or combing through
assigned texts for useful passages, our students are doing a fairly good job of finding and presenting evidence for their arguments. They could do much better, however, in considering evidence that conflicts with their own arguments and assumptions. Students often only present evidence consistent with their own views. 5. Presentation of Ideas: Average paper score: 2.9 Finally, our students generally present their ideas fairly well. Most of the papers have a clear thesis and relatively few writing errors. Presentation could often be improved, however, through a clearer thesis statement and more careful organization. 2c) Areas where students are doing well As noted above, our students seem to be doing the best with regard to assembling evidence, summarizing basic concepts, and the basic mechanics of writing. 2d) Areas where students need improvement The greatest need for improvement appears to be in the area of linking theories and evidence and critically evaluating concepts. Students also need to learn to organize their papers more carefully so as to clarify the purpose and direction of their writing. Overall one might say that our students need help in learning to develop and present their own ideas in conversation with the course texts. As suggested in our last assessment, it appears that we need to find better ways of relating what students are learning in their General Education classes on Critical Thinking to their work in Government courses.

**program_change**: We plan on revising our evaluation rubric to be more applicable across different subdisciplines of political science. We would also like to organize a department meeting to exchange ideas and methods on writing assignments. We have not recently engaged in any other assessment activities.

**procedure**: repeated use of above measures

**academic_change**: We would also like to organize a department meeting to exchange ideas and methods on writing assignments. We have not recently engaged in any other assessment activities.

**Upcoming_year**: continued use of above measures

**NotEngage:**