Program: Government Major-International Concentration

Department: Government

Number of students enrolled in the program in Fall, 2011: 154

Faculty member completing template: David Andersen, James Cox, Buzz Fozouni, Andrew Hertzoff, and Nancy Lapp (Date: 2/12/2012)

Period of reference in the template: 2006-07 to present

1. Please describe your program’s learning-outcomes trajectory since 2006-07: Has there been a transformation of organizational culture regarding the establishment of learning outcomes and the capacity to assess progress toward their achievement? If so, during which academic year would you say the transformation became noticeable? What lies ahead; what is the next likely step in developing a learning-outcomes organizational culture within the program? [Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

The department’s International Relations concentration develops the same general intellectual skills as the overall Government Major. While some of the core requirements and electives differ, thus leading to slightly different expectations regarding specific knowledge acquisition, both tracts have equivalent learning outcomes.

The Government Department’s learning-outcomes trajectory has followed a steady and carefully considered course. Departmental efforts at identifying and assessing goals began a decade ago, and the department has continued to regularly examine its goals and efforts. Since 2006-2007, the department and its assessment committee have continued to implement and evaluate the department’s assessment plan, including using surveys and rubrics to gather data. Although this process has followed an evolutionary direction rather than an abrupt transformation, 2010 marks an important point. As part of its self-study, the department conducted a faculty survey of its entire undergraduate curriculum, extensively discussed the results, and began making revisions to procedures, curriculum, and assessment. Furthermore, last year the assessment committee proposed a new three-year plan for assessing the department’s learning goals which make significant changes in the implementation plan and the rubrics used for assessment. Addressing the issues raised by the self-study and implementing this three-year plan will likely occupy the department in the next few years.
2. Please list in prioritized order (or indicate no prioritization regarding) up to four desired learning outcomes (“takeaways” concerning such elements of curriculum as perspectives, specific content knowledge, skill sets, confidence levels) for students completing the program. For each stated outcome, please provide the reason that it was designated as desired by the faculty associated with the program.

a)  
b)  
c)  
d)  

[Please limit your response per outcome to 300 words or less]

Without any particular prioritization, the Department of Government has identified three general intellectual skills that we seek to develop in our students (a, b, c), as well as a substantial competence in the study of government (d).

a) **Knowledge Acquisition**—The Government Department seeks to strengthen the abilities of students to acquire and understand information, facts, and theories. It is well-established that participation in politics, whether in domestic policy analysis or foreign affairs, requires students, analysts and citizens to become familiar with topics and ideas in a wide variety of areas. This ability includes the familiarity with library research and use of web resources; acquaintance with standard government and political resources; and use of statistical databases. It also involves analytic skills of concept formation; analysis of situations; recognition of statistical significance and the ability to interpret written and verbal arguments.

b) **Evaluation and Judgment**—Students need to be able to critically examine arguments, claims, and alternative explanations. They should be able to understand the significance of claims, identify obvious objections, and evaluate the validity of arguments. In order to fully participate as citizens and as leaders, students need to be able to rationally adjudicate between competing claims and see the implications, positive and negative, of both theoretical and practical statements. This includes mastering quantitative methodology; understanding scientific reasoning; and becoming familiar with evidence-based argumentation, logic, reading comprehension skills, and philosophical and legal analysis.

c) **Presentation of ideas and student engagement**—Being actors in a democratic arena, students need to become comfortable with presenting facts, arguments, research results, and debates to others in both verbal and written form. Students should be able to express themselves coherently and clearly in writing and oral presentations. They should be able to respond to questions, and advocate in a
variety of ways for their views. We expect students to learn ways to participate in the political process, becoming more active as citizens.

d) **Knowledge of the study of politics**—Although there is less agreement about a core of knowledge in the ecumenical study of politics than in some other disciplines, there is strong agreement in the department that students should have a background in fundamental political and legal ideas; familiarity with global institutions, American political institutions, Constitutional Law, Federalism, and the unique aspects of California state politics; a knowledge of other nations and cultures and theories of international relations; awareness of ways in which international relations are carried out and understood; comprehension of political processes and factors, both in domestic and international politics; and basic knowledge of the methods and goals of political science.

3. **For undergraduate programs only**, in what ways are the set of desired learning outcomes described above aligned with the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals? Please be as specific as possible.  

[Please limit your response to 400 words or less]

The Government department’s desired learning outcomes align substantially with the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

Nearly all the department’s learning outcomes relate to Competence in the Disciplines. This university goal expects that students demonstrate “informed understandings” of a major field, and the “ability to demonstrate the competencies and values listed below.” The department’s “knowledge of the study of politics” goal expects students acquire a strong background in the fundamentals of the study of politics that spans the major subfields of the discipline.

The subject matter of the department’s Knowledge of the study of politics outcome pertains primarily to the social sciences criteria listed in the university’s goal of Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World. The study of fundamental political and legal ideas, institutions, cultures, and political processes inexorably encompasses “engagement with big questions, contemporary and enduring.” Subjects include concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, as well as questions regarding the desired kind of political structures necessary to achieve the well-being of the whole of society.

The department’s Knowledge Acquisition, Evaluation and Judgment, and Presentation of ideas and student engagement outcomes coincide with the university goals listed
under Intellectual and Practical Skills, which includes “inquiry and analysis, critical and philosophical thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy... and “problem solving.” The Government department’s Knowledge Acquisition goals include information acquisition (ability to properly use appropriate library, government, and internet resources), conceptual thinking and identification of theories (including the ability to interpret written and verbal arguments), and recognition of statistical inference. The department’s Evaluation and Judgment outcomes pertain to inquiry and analysis and critical and philosophical thinking – department outcomes include being able to evaluate arguments. “Written and oral communication” are found in the department’s Presentation of ideas and student engagement outcome, which is our expectation that students learn to express themselves clearly and coherently and participate in the community effectively. As the department has verified in its self-study, these skills are emphasized throughout the courses offered by the department, and the courses become progressively more challenging.

The department’s outcomes also align with Personal and Social Responsibility. It is important to note that the department has delineated specific learning outcomes for its majors (discussed in answer #2), but also has broader goals for our department. The department has been clear that “we see our goal as creating an intellectual environment where students can develop their academic skills, think more critically about their world, and prepare to become citizens and productive members of society” (department memo, 2001). To this end, the department strives to create opportunities for our students to participate politically. Thus, with regard to the goal of “civic knowledge and engagement – local and global, “as well as “active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges,” the department promotes internships, clubs, and activities such as the Model United Nations. More precisely, the department’s Knowledge of the Study of Politics goal includes knowledge of other cultures and engagement with “big questions” that ultimately include “ethical reasoning and action.” Put together, the department’s learning outcomes provide strong “foundations and skills for lifelong learning.”

4. For each desired outcome indicated in item 2 above, please:
   a) Describe the method(s) by which its ongoing pursuit is monitored and measured.
   b) Include a description of the sample of students (e.g., random sample of transfer students declaring the major; graduating seniors) from whom data were/will be collected and the frequency and schedule with which the data in question were/will be collected.
   c) Describe and append a sample (or samples) of the “instrument” (e.g., survey or test), “artifact” (e.g., writing sample and evaluative protocol, performance review sheet), or other device used to assess the status of the learning outcomes desired by the program.
   d) Explain how the program faculty analyzed and evaluated (will analyze and evaluate) the data to reach conclusions about each desired student learning outcome.

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less per learning outcome]
Since we have used the same instruments to assess more than one goal, and we are in the process of changing our assessment procedures, it will be useful to provide a quick history of our assessment methods. We have measured our goals directly by developing a writing rubric and collecting papers from our upper division courses. We asked several instructors to randomly select three to five papers from their class. The courses we selected included all our required major courses that assigned papers as well as other upper division courses with paper assignments. We then used these papers to assess several of our goals. This was useful in many ways, but we found that different courses emphasized different goals and it was difficult to apply the rubric consistently. For example, some papers asked students to analyze texts assigned in class while others asked students to formulate their own questions and find their own sources. We also had limited data about how far each student had progressed through the major, so we were evaluating both juniors who might be taking their first Government course along with students who were graduating seniors. Two years ago, as part of our self-study, we conducted a focused inquiry of our courses. We surveyed faculty members asking them what goals they focused on and whether they considered their courses basic, intermediate or advanced. These results have made it easier to choose the courses where we assess papers and to improve our writing rubric. We have also conducted a senior survey where we ask students about their experience at Sacramento State and some of the same questions were included on an alumni survey.

**Goal 1: Knowledge Acquisition** – We focused on this goal in our 2010-11 annual assessment. The first step in this process was to survey faculty about the use of outside sources in their class. We asked faculty if they assigned papers that required outside sources, whether they gave them any help in finding those sources and what policies they had regarding citation of the sources. We found that many course require students to do research outside of class. With this information we decided to examine two broad questions: 1.) what sources are students using in their papers? and 2.) how are students citing those sources? We also used these open-ended questions to help us develop a better rubric for this goal.

To answer these questions, the Government Department assessment committee surveyed 26 papers from six upper-division courses to determine the quality and types of sources that were being used in assigned research papers. These papers came from a combination of required and elective courses. Different courses had different requirements regarding both the types of sources to be used and the type of citation method. We examined whether
students were citing papers correctly and we calculated the number and types of sources for papers. We also applied our rubric to assess how well students acquired information.

**Goal 2: Evaluation and Judgment** – This goal has been assessed both directly and indirectly. We believe that the best way to develop evaluation and judgment skills is through reading and writing. Therefore, we conducted a survey of our seniors asking them how much writing they did in their courses and whether they believe their critical thinking skills have improved. Some of these questions overlap with questions we ask our alumni and our faculty. From these three surveys we can assess to what extent our major is focusing on the core skills related to evaluation and judgment. The survey of seniors was done by going to upper division courses and asking government majors to fill out the survey. We surveyed all students, but separated out seniors. Although this was not a random sample, in a given year we surveyed the vast majority of our seniors taking upper division courses.

We have also assessed this goal directly by developing a writing rubric and reading papers from several of our required and elective upper division courses. We asked instructors in several of our courses to randomly select three papers and we generally ended up with around 20 papers. The writing rubric, which is attached, separates the evaluation and judgment goal into two parts. The first has to do with conceptual thinking and the second with application of evidence. The rubric contains four categories including inadequate, needs work, meets requirements, and excellent work. A committee of three faculty read through the 20 or so papers and assigned a score to each one. When there was disagreement about the category, we would discuss the paper and come to an agreement about where it fit. This type of assessment has been done several times, and as described above we found the rubric hard to apply to all papers. In our most recent assessments we have been working on improving our sampling and instrument.

**Goal 3: Presentation of ideas and student engagement** – The presentation of ideas was assessed using the same rubric and paper sample described above. Student engagement was assessed through our senior survey. We asked students whether they felt they are “more likely to participate in political and community activities” since being a government major. We also ask student whether they participated in an internship.

**Goal 4: Knowledge of the study of politics** – This goal has been assessed indirectly through our senior survey. Most of our assessment focus has been on critical thinking skills, but we are presently working on an instrument to assess substantive learning that will be incorporated into our assessment.
5. Regarding each outcome and method discussed in items 2 and 4 above, please provide examples of how findings from the learning outcomes process have been utilized to address decisions to revise or maintain elements of the curriculum (including decisions to alter the program’s desired outcomes). If such decision-making has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less per item]

a)
b)c)
d)

**Goal 1: Knowledge Acquisition** – Our most recent assessment focused on this goal and found that most or our students generally did a good job citing information and were drawing on a wide variety of sources to make their arguments. However, we also found that many students did not know how to properly cite sources and often relied on weak sources that were probably easily accessed through Google. During our faculty retreat, we discussed this issue and agreed that we would create a department wide policy to require Chicago citation format so students would have one format they would need to learn. We also discussed how to help students find and use better sources for their research papers. Faculty agreed that we emphasize library skill and quality sources for papers requiring outside research. We will assess this goal again in a few years to see if these actions have helped.

**Goal 2: Evaluation and Judgment** – In our senior survey we found that about 70% of our students report writing more than one paper per course and almost all report writing at least one paper per course. Our survey of faculty found students write on average 13.94 pages in intermediate course and 19.37 pages in advanced courses. In our direct assessment of student papers, we examined conceptual thinking and the application of evidence using our writing rubric. We found that overall our students did well in both, with the average scores in the meets expectation range, but they were generally better at applying evidence than in explaining concepts.

There are several changes in our curriculum that have been made to enhance student evaluation skills. One change that we made to our curriculum to enhance student learning was to implement a methods requirement for all students. Before 2008, only our International Relations major had to take this course. We also changed the course to focus more on quantitative skills and have students work with data. Although our students apply evidence well, we felt like we could strengthen this skill. A second change we are making is to improve our advising in light of the focused inquiry we did as part of our self-study. We are trying to do a better job of directing students to intermediate course before they take more advanced courses. Finally, our department has also tried to protect what we are
doing well in the face of declining resources and demands for larger class sizes. As part of the discussion of how much writing our students do and the importance to our curricular goals, the department has made an effort to keep the size of our upper division advanced courses from rising too much. When the department was faced with the alternative to increasing upper division class sizes or eliminating our graduate International Affairs program, we chose to eliminate the graduate program. We are also currently discussing how we can revamp our other graduate program to reduce graduate offerings.

**Goal 3: Presentation of ideas and student engagement** – The changes we made to the curriculum discussed above also apply to presentation of ideas as well. As part of student engagement our departments want to encourage students to engage with their campus and larger community and provide opportunities for them to do so. According to our senior survey, about a third of our majors do an internship. A large number of them end up working for the state legislature. We also created our Odyssey Mentor Program as a way for more advanced students to mentor newer students. This program has been a great success both for mentors and mentees. Unfortunately, both our internship program and Odyssey Mentor Program will be difficult to sustain in the future if resources continue to diminish. We may face difficult choices in the future to put faculty time into these programs or maintain class sizes for our more advanced upper division courses.

**Goal 4: Knowledge of the study of politics** – We are currently developing an instrument to assess substantive learning. However, we constantly discuss our curriculum and whether we have the right mix of required and elective courses. We have discussed adding a small seminar that would act as a capstone course, but limited resources make this impossible.

6. Has the program systematically sought data from alumni to measure the longer-term effects of accomplishment of the program’s learning outcomes? If so, please describe the approach to this information-gathering and the ways in which the information will be applied to the program’s curriculum. If such activity has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

[Please limit your response to 300 words or less]

There have been two surveys of Government alumni. The first was administered in 2002. It consisted of a total of 22 closed-ended (forced-choice) questions, of which 16 directly related to alumni’s views on the major’s curriculum and how well it prepared them toward their career paths. There were also three open-ended questions inquiring about the most useful courses and suggestions for improvements. The second survey, conducted in 2009, consisted of a total of 36
closed-ended questions, of which 30 directly related to the curriculum and how well it prepared the majors for their careers.

Although for assessment purposes surveys such as the above are regarded as indirect measures, nevertheless, they can often provide very useful information. In particular, there are at least four questions in the 2009 survey that would allow us to generate some quasi-experimental data in the future to assess the impact of changes in our curriculum. One of the changes we should be able to study using the alumni survey is in academic advising. Although we have always strongly encouraged all majors to seek advising from Government faculty members, beginning in August 2010 all incoming freshmen and transfer students have been assigned a Government faculty advisor by Barbara Kelly, Enrollment Systems Analyst, Advisement/Graduation, using a quota system to achieve an equitable distribution of advisees among the full-time faculty members. In almost all cases, undeclared students and students changing majors will receive advising from the Chair, and occasionally from a faculty member chosen by students. Academic advising is now mandatory prior to approving of the declaration of major form by the Chair. Advisements are documented on advising forms and scanned to the shared drive under the name of each advisor, with the original advising form given to students. It would be very useful to compare the 2009 responses to Question 8, “The quality of advising received by the department” with virtually the same set of questions in the new alumni survey (see below).

This year the Office of Institutional Research has completed work on a draft of a 34-item generic battery of questions. These items are being currently reviewed and their final version will be used for all future alumni surveys. This change in survey instruments could pose a challenge in comparing the new data with those from the prior years, especially with regard to assessing the impact of GOVT 100. In the new alumni survey, the questions that most closely match questions 19 and 21 of the 2009 survey are Question 14 (“Information literacy and research skills”) and Question 11 (“Critical thinking”) respectively. Question 17 (“Needed technical skills”) has been dropped from the new set, and instead there is Question 13 (“Understanding and using quantitative information”) which directly relates to the main theme of GOVT 100. Moreover, it is our understanding that, once the new survey questions are adopted, each department will be allowed to add up to five additional questions to address their specific needs. Our department plans to carefully review the responses of the previous alumni survey in the light of our learning outcomes and the university’s baccalaureate goals, and to generate up to five additional questions to make better use of the information from future alumni surveys to assess achievement of our learning goals.
7. Does the program pursue learning outcomes identified by an accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization as important? Does the set of outcomes pursued by your program exceed those identified as important by your accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization?

[Please limit your response to 300 words or less]

The discipline of political science and the field of International Relations do not have any formal accrediting association, nor have the discipline’s or the field’s major associations created any universally agreed upon learning outcomes.

8. Finally, what additional information would you like to share with the Senate Committee on Instructional Program Priorities regarding the program’s desired learning outcomes and assessment of their accomplishment?

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

The Government Department considers assessment a long-term project that will have to be undertaken in many stages. Each assessment step is provisional and careful as we try to wrestle with the following problems: How do we balance the need for institutional and department oversight with our desire to preserve faculty autonomy, creativity, and diversity of approaches? How do we assess general critical skills in the midst of substantive courses? What factual knowledge and objective content can be assessed, and which content makes up the solid core of what we believe a major in Government should stand for? Throughout this process, as we take up individual parts of the major we have continued to evaluate our assessment tools; reconsidered what it is we hope to assess; and continued a dialogue about exactly what we believe is the core of our department. As such, this project has been helpful in focusing us as a department. Although the department has always engaged in these discussions, assessment has helped make these more focused and given them a structure they lacked before.