

Annual Assessment for the Department of Government

2012-2013

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1. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented **any changes for your assessment including learning outcomes, assessment plan, assessment tools (methods, rubrics, curriculum map, or key assignment etc.), and/or the university baccalaureate learning goals?**

- a. If so, what are those changes? How did you implement those changes?
- b. How do you know if these changes have achieved the desired results?
- c. If no, why not?

We submitted an overview of our assessment policies as part of our IPP and received feedback from the Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA). In response to this feedback we made several changes to our assessment plan and learning goals. The following changes were made to our assessment plan.

1.) The OAPA suggested that we "clarify how many learning outcomes are included in a single learning goal." We addressed this by specifying our goals and learning outcomes and making them easier to measure.

2.) The OAPA suggested that we assess one or two learning outcomes each year and we developed a schedule over the next several years to do this.

3.) We refined our rubric for assessing how students use evidence in their written work. We also began the process of developing rubrics for other goals.

4.) We began developing new substantive learning goals where we will assess how well students have learned specific concepts in Political Science. We will develop these goals and rubrics in future years.

5.) We developed a separate, but overlapping assessment plan for our International Relations Major. Rubrics and more specific learning outcomes will be developed in future years.

These changes reflect a major change in our assessment plan. We do not know exactly what impact these changes will have on our assessment or major because they have just begun.

2. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented **any other changes at the department, the college or the university, including advising, co-curriculum, budgeting and planning?**

- a. If so, what are those changes? How did you implement those changes?
- b. How do you know if these changes have achieved the desired results?
- c. If no, why not?

We did not do an assessment last year because IPP was undertaken in lieu of assessment, but in the previous year we assessed how well students find and cite information in their research papers. We implemented a couple of changes in light of this assessment. First, we decided to use Chicago style citation format for all our courses. In the past, every teacher had a different policy regarding citation,

which we believed made it harder for them to learn and practice proper citation. Second, during our departmental retreat we discussed strategies for how we could help our students find and recognize quality sources in Political Science. During this year's retreat we will discuss how those strategies have worked.

3. What **PROGRAM** (not course) learning outcome(s) have you assessed this academic year?

Our assessment was made up of three parts. First, we did a follow-up analysis of our self-study. In the self-study we surveyed faculty to assess the skills required and difficulty of all of our courses. This was extremely helpful in assessing our advising system and whether the advice we were giving to our students about course progression was consistent with the difficulty and skills of course requirements. This process led to much fruitful discussion and more consistent advising to our students. This year we wanted to find out if our students were following our advice about course progression and we analyzed when students were taking required courses.

Second, we analyzed a learning outcomes related to our critical thinking goal. It states:

Goal 2b: Students should be able to provide appropriate evidence to support claims and arguments and recognize obvious objections and alternative views.

Finally, we also did a pre-test of the goal we plan to assess next year to help us develop and implement a better measure. It states:

Goal 2a: Student identifies and evaluates the context and underlying assumptions of competing arguments.

4. What method(s)/measure(s) have you used to collect the data?

We examined when students were taking our courses by looking at Congnos data. We looked at all our core courses from 2006 to 2012 and the percentage of majors who were seniors or non-seniors. Although most of the non-seniors were juniors, we do have a small percentage of sophomores taking our upper division course. This analysis was done for both our IR and Government majors.

To assess the *evidence* learning outcome 2b, we used research papers from our two of our required courses. In previous years, we selected a sample of papers from several different courses, but we found it was difficult to apply the rubric consistently for very different types of paper assignments. This year we decided to assess all the papers in two courses that had research assignments that specifically asked student to research and apply evidence to an argument. In both assignments, students were required to use the library or internet to find information. The required paper length was around 12-14 pages for both classes. We chose to assess papers in Government 170, Public Policy Development, and Government 130, International Relations Theory. Government 170 is required for all regular Government majors and we advise our student to take it in their senior year. Also, enrollment in the course is restricted to students who passed the WPJ. Govt 170 is the closest we have to a capstone course. As can be seen in Table 1 below, which lists all the core courses in our regular Government major, over 80% of Government majors follow our advice and take this course in their senior year. Government 130 was chosen because it is a required course for both Government and IR concentration students and, therefore we have a large number of students to examine. About one-quarter of all the students in these courses were non-majors, but they were not included in the analysis. We did include students who were double-majors. Tables 1

and 2 list students by class level as either seniors or non-seniors, but only a few non-seniors were sophomores and none were freshman.

The papers assignment for 170 required students to choose a domestic policy proposal and analyze the prospects for the policy being adopted. Students needed to assess both the impediments and windows of opportunity for policy change and offer an assessment. This assignment required them to research the political and institutional background of the policy and apply evidence to their argument. The paper assignment for Govt 130 required students to critically analyze prominent theories in international relations and assess how well those theories could explain a case study of international politics. The case study required them to collect and apply evidence to their argument.

A rubric was developed that could be used for evaluating research papers in both Govt 130 and Govt 170. The rubric is included below. There were two sections of both Govt 170 and Govt 130, but the analysis did not differentiate between the different sections. The two instructors discussed how this rubric would be applied and tested it by using the papers from the assessment we did two years ago. They assigned scores, 1-4, which represented the categories *inadequate*, *needs work*, *shows competency*, and *excellent* work. They found that they were able to agree on its application. When there was disagreement it was usually over whether to assign a score between one of the two categories like 2.5 versus 2. Each instructor then provided the rubric to their students with the paper assignment and then assigned scores to each paper when grading them. The instructors then reviewed each other's scoring for three papers and had a third faculty member look over a small sample of both papers. There was almost no disagreement about the categories students fell into, but once again where there was disagreement it was over assigning scores half-way between the categories.

5. What are the criteria and/or standards of performance for the program learning outcome?

We would like all of our students to meet the standard of competency and a significant number to show excellent work. However, we realize that not all students will meet this standard. We would like the average of all our students to be above 2.5, which is the half-way point between needs work and shows competency.

6. What data have you collected? What are the results and findings, including the percentage of students who meet each standard?

To assess our advising system, we examined when students took core courses in both our Government and IR majors. Tables 1 and 2 report the results for students taking courses from 2006 and 2012.

Table 1: Class Level and Course Difficult for Core Cores in Government Major

Course	Percent Soph+Jun	Percent senior	Avg. Class size	Professor Rated difficulty
170	16.4%	83.6%	32.3	advanced
100	47.7%	52.3%	31.2	advanced
130	47.4%	52.1%	43.6	intermediate
120A	53.7%	45.1%	30.1	intermediate
120B	59.2%	40.4%	27.6	intermediate
110	67.6%	31.2%	40.1	intermediate
111	71.6%	28.1%	44.4	intermediate

Table 2: Class Level and Course Difficult for Core Cores in IR Concentration

Course	Percent Soph+Jun	Senior	Avg. class size	Rated difficulty
140	19.0%	81.0%	48.0	advanced
136	24.5%	75.5%	49.6	advanced
100	42.7%	56.8%	31.2	advanced
130	61.2%	38.3%	43.6	intermediate
111	79.7%	20.3%	44.4	intermediate
112	77.0%	20.2%	31.2	advanced

We see that most students are taking advanced courses later in their careers. For both majors, political theory courses are the main point of entry into our major. This is as an appropriate place to start the major. We also see that for our Government and IR concentration majors take advanced courses in their senior year. We are a little concerned that too many of our IR majors are taking Govt 130 in their senior year. Govt 130 provides introduction to theories in international relations and would it would be better if they took this course earlier. We have also designed our curriculum so that our advanced courses have smaller class sizes. Two exceptions are Govt 140 and Govt 136 for our IR majors. This has happened because the number of IR majors has increased and we only offer these courses once per year.

To assess the *use of evidence* outcome, we collected research papers for 89 government majors in two courses and 17 IR majors in one course. The IR major is smaller than Government, so there are fewer papers to analyze. Each paper was assigned a score for applying evidence to arguments that ranged from 1-4 as described above. In some cases, papers were assigned an extra 0.5points if it was felt that the students fit somewhere between two categories. The tables below break down the results for both our Government and International Relations majors by class status.

Table 3: Scoring for Government 170 Papers - Regular Government Majors

	Excellent (4)	Shows Competency (3)	Needs Work (2)	Inadequate (1)	Average Score	N
Seniors	25.0%	36.1%	27.8%	11.1%	2.91	36
Non-Seniors	0.0%	66.7%	22.2%	11.1%	2.67	9
Total	20.0%	42.2%	26.7%	11.1%	2.80	45

Table 4: Scoring for Government 130 Papers – Regular Government Majors

	Excellent (4)	Shows Competency (3)	Needs Work (2)	Inadequate (1)	Average Score	N
Seniors	25.0%	33.3%	29.2%	12.5%	2.73	24
Non-Seniors	10.0%	45.0%	35.0%	10.0%	2.67	20
Total	18.2%	38.6%	31.8%	11.4%	2.70	44

Table 5: Scoring for Government 130 Papers - IR Concentration

	Excellent (4)	Shows Competency (3)	Needs Work (2)	Inadequate (1)	Average Score	N
Seniors	33.3%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	2.83	9
Non-Seniors	25.0%	0.0%	62.5%	12.5%	2.5	8
Total	29.4%	11.8%	41.2%	17.6%	2.68	17

For Government majors, 25 percent of our seniors did an excellent job of applying evidence to their arguments. Over 58 percent of seniors in both courses showed competency or were excellent. The biggest difference between our seniors and juniors were the number of students who scored in the excellent category. The average scores for seniors were higher than non-seniors in both Government 170 and Government 130.

The results for IR concentration students in Government 130 is similar to that of Government majors. Seniors had a higher average, but a larger percentage of seniors were in the inadequate category. It is to be expected that our IR and Government majors would be similar. As we discussed in previous assessments, the IR and Government majors have different substantive material, but the types of writing assignments used are similar in both majors.

- a. In what areas are students doing well and achieving the expectations?

We are pleased that a majority of our seniors are able to appropriately use evidence in their arguments. Even those students who scored in the needs work category were able to apply evidence to some parts of their arguments, but in these cases there were holes in the evidentiary support for their arguments or they did not consider counter evidence. We are also pleased that we see a large increase in the percent scoring excellent between seniors and non-seniors. We are not following the same students, but we can see an improvement in the excellent category between juniors and seniors that is consistent across the two courses and majors. Another encouraging sign is that almost as many of our seniors were in the excellent category as the needs work category.

b. In what areas do students need improvement?

Most of our students did well on this goal, but one area where our students need improvement is in using quality sources. Students were allowed to use course reading assignments for part of their evidence. Students generally were able to understand and apply this evidence appropriately. However, some students who were in the *needs work* and *inadequate* categories fell there not because they used evidence inappropriately, but because they had no sources to support key points. There are two possible explanations for the lack of supporting evidence in their papers. Students may not have the research skills to find appropriate sources and or they did not put in the necessary effort to research their topics. The instructors for the course believe both factors may play a role, but a large part of the problem is due to lack of student effort in finding these sources. It is difficult to assess a particular student's skill if they do not put forth their best effort. Luckily, this is only true for a small minority of our students.

7. As a result of this year's assessment effort, do you anticipate or propose any changes for your program (e.g. structures, content, or learning outcomes)?

a. If so, what changes do you anticipate? How do you plan to implement those changes?

When we examined how our students progressed through our program, we were pleased that most students followed our advice and took intermediate courses first. We do plan on reemphasizing to our IR students that they would be better off taking Government 130 earlier in their careers. We also have begun offering extra sections of Government 136 and 140 so we can lower the size of these courses. We believe that this will allow us to help students master the skills we have set as goals in the IR concentration.

For the applying evidence outcome, students exceeded our expectations and there is some indication that students were improving their skills between their junior and senior years, especially moving into the excellent category. We do plan to discuss and implement informal changes. First, we will discuss how we can improve our students' research skills so they can locate appropriate evidence for their arguments. We do not believe that lack of research skills is a major hole in our curriculum because most of our students are able to find appropriate sources. We will discuss possible solutions like discussing research skills in introductory courses and having a librarian give a lecture to our classes. Second, we also think that we can deal with some of this problem through advising. Some of our seniors appear to be overwhelmed during their final semester. Some of these students are enrolled in our internship program and find themselves busier than they anticipated. Many are also trying to find employment or preparing for graduate school. We may help our students better prepare for their final semester by helping them plan better so they do not overschedule their final year. We do not plan on making any formal changes to our course requirements which would require a stricter progression through required courses. We believe this might increase the time it takes them to graduate. This is especially true for our non-traditional student who often work many hours and take many of their courses at night. They need some flexibility in the order they take their course to graduate in reasonable amount of time. Finally, we also plan on talking during

our retreat about how we can deal with students who try to put in the minimum work when they run into difficult assignments like longer research papers.

b. How do you know if these changes will achieve the desired results?

We will informally monitor progress and assess this goal again in future years.

8. Which program learning outcome(s) do you plan to assess next year? How?

We will assess Goal 2b of our critical thinking goal which states: Student identifies and evaluates the context and underlying assumptions of competing arguments.

We began the process of assessment this year by conducting a pre-test for the Govt 130 papers we used for Goal 2a this year. The Govt 130 paper required students to conduct a literature review of different theories. Using the pre-test this year will be helpful in fine-tuning our rubric and helping us consistently apply it next year. We will collect papers from core courses in both our Government and IR majors and assess the competing arguments goal in a way similar to this year.

Appendix

Government Goals

Goal 1: Communication—Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively about politics and government.

- a.) Students can use the library and web resources to find information relating to government and politics.
- b.) Students can properly cite sources used in their research.
- c.) Students should be able to express themselves coherently in writing about politics and government.

Goal 2: Critical Thinking —Students need to be able to critically examine arguments, claims, and alternative explanations.

- a.) Student identifies and evaluates the context and underlying assumptions of competing arguments.
- b.) Students should be able to provide appropriate evidence to support claims and arguments and recognize obvious objections and alternative views.
- c.) Students will be able to analyze quantitative data and write up research findings.

Goal 3: Core Knowledge of Politics and Government --- Students should be familiar with key concepts and knowledge in the areas of American politics and Government, international relations, and political theory.

- a.) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the working American politics and institutions. Students will analyze current political and policy issues using theories from political science.
- b.) IR subgoal – **being developed**
- c.) Theory subgoal – **being developed**

International Relations Goals

Goal 1: Communication—Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively about politics and government.

- a.) Students can use the library and web resources to find information relating to government and politics.
- b.) Students can properly cite sources used in their research.
- c.) Students should be able to express themselves coherently in writing about politics and government.

Goal 2: Critical Thinking —Students need to be able to critically examine arguments, claims, and alternative explanations.

- a.) Student identifies and evaluates the context and underlying assumptions of competing arguments.
- b.) Students should be able to provide appropriate evidence to support claims and arguments and recognize obvious objections and alternative views.
- c.) Students will be able to analyze quantitative data and write up research findings.

Goal 3: Core Knowledge of International Relations --- Students should be familiar with key concepts and knowledge in the areas of American politics and Government, international relations, and political theory

- a.) **IR Theory – being developed**
- b.) **comparative politics -- being developed**
- c.) **International Political Economy – being developed**

Rubric for Goals 2b.

Element	Definition	Inadequate (1)	Needs Work (2)	Shows Competency (3)	Excellent Work (4)
Use of Evidence Goal 2b	Student is able to recognize and provide appropriate evidence to support claims and arguments.	Little evidence exists to back up student's claims or argument. Evidence is used poorly or is irrelevant to the argument.	Student uses some evidence, but it is insufficient. Main points of the paper are poorly supported. Counter evidence is only touched upon or not considered.	Student provides sufficient and appropriate evidence to back major portions of their argument. Counter evidence is considered.	Student provides compelling evidence to back up argument. Student also assesses conflicting evidence.

