ASSESSMENT REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE FOR THE BACHELORS DEGREE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

AY 2015-16

**BACHELORS DEGREE PROGRAM**

This report is organized around the six questions asked in the Department / Programs Annual Report Guidelines.

**Question #1: What learning outcomes did you assess this year?**

We assessed all learning outcomes this year but one. First, we conducted our annual pre-test / post-test measuring student knowledge relevant to the discipline of political science, a direct measure assessing learning outcomes 1, 3, and 4 in our SOAP. The other was the assessment of student writing ability in the discipline of political science, which is a direct measure of learning outcomes 2 and 3. The measure we did not conduct this year was our assessment of student analytical ability by having them write public policy memos (this is a new direct measure this year) which assesses learning outcomes 2 and 5.

**Question #2: What instruments did you use to assess them?**

The knowledge of political science outcome measure is assessed with our pre-test / post-test. This is a quiz that asks six fundamental questions regarding knowledge that should be acquired as part of a political science degree. The quiz was developed by the political science department faculty in 2007, with a revision done in 2010.

The other outcome measure, writing ability, is assessed with the research paper writing rubric that the department developed in 2006 and has used consistently ever since.

**Question #3: What did you discover from these data?**

Pre-test / post-test knowledge assessment

As laid out in our SOAP, the knowledge measure is assessed with pre-test and post-test quizzes. The pre-test is always given in our introductory course, PLSI 1. We then administer the exact same quiz to all graduating seniors. The results presented here are the results of the post-test administered this year compared with pre-test from four years ago, which is more or less the time when these same students likely took PLSI 1. In 2009-10 the average pre-test grade was 3.73 on a scale of 1 to 6 (the highest possible average score is 6). This is the base-line against which we assess student knowledge when they graduate. The 2015-16 post-test average was 5.41, which is just slightly lower than last year’s score of 5.44. We still feel that students are acquiring knowledge relevant to the major. It is also worth noting that few students got the wrong answer on any of the post-test questions, indicating that there is no particular piece of knowledge that was systematically lacking.

Paper writing assessment

The writing rubric was used to assess a random sample of student papers kept on file in the political science department office. The papers are from core courses for the major that all students must take. Below are the specific items assessed with the rubric, the results for the sample of students on a scale of 1 to 5, and an indication as to whether this is an improvement over last year’s average scores:

Measure on the rubric Average Change

Displays an understanding of the issues in the pertinent literature: 4.03 +

Quality of theoretical argument: 3.5 +

Clarity, originality, and conciseness of the theoretical argument: 3.2 −

Quality of organization: 3.40 N/C

Quality of writing: 3.28 −

Sources properly cited: 4.26 +

The scores for this year are pretty similar to the scores from last year, so in all cases where plus are minuses are indicated, the differences from last year are very minor. Overall writing remains a challenge, though the scores overall are higher than average. Having said that, in the first and last categories student average scores are in the top 4-5 category, so there is little room now for significant improvement. The middle four categories have scores in the 3-4 range showing that there is still room for improvement.

**Question #4: What changes did you make as a result of the findings?**

Here are some of the modifications the Department is considering in response to the 2015-2016 assessment:

* Regarding advising, we have decided to partner with our college’s advising center. We will work out the full scope of this partnership sometimes in the fall semester.
* The knowledge assessment from the pre-test / post-test showed strength in student learning, so no changes are necessary there
* The writing assessment showed tiny changes from last year, so we will continue to discuss how to improve student writing abilities
* These results, plus results from our alumni survey a couple of years earlier, revealed that we are deficient in teaching computer skills and teamwork / leadership skills. Several faculty have also mentioned that we need to emphasize use of computer software like Excel in the classroom, so PLSI 90, a class many graduates felt was not so useful, is being changed to emphasize use of Excel. Dr. Holyoke also teaches the class by putting students into teams to work together to solve problems, so hopefully this will help increase student experiences in teamwork
* Based on these findings, the faculty have decided to have a top to bottom review of the department’s curriculum for the bachelors degree in political science, including the core classes required of all students to make sure they conform to prevailing norms in the political science discipline and are providing the best knowledge and skills for our students. A department committee is being assembled this semester to review the curriculum and make recommendations for possible change to the department.

Overall, the faculty in the Political Science department will continue improving the program student learning outcome assessment activities and initiate assessment of core competencies in areas of oral and written communication, critical thinking, information literary and quantitative reasoning. This core competency assessment of core competencies can be infused with the existing SOAP as it evolves and develops, or as part of a university-wide evaluation process.

**Question #5: What assessment activities will you be conducting in the 2016-2017 academic year?**

We will conduct the normal assessment that we do most years. Only the alumni survey done in 2013 will not be done for a few more years. This year we will administer our usual pre-test to the PLSI 1 classes early in the fall semester to get baseline data on our undergraduates. In the spring semester we will give the post-test to the graduating seniors. Data and other results will be presented to the department for discussion in the spring semester of 2017. We will also do our standard analysis of research papers from the core classes, and will also do our analysis of the policy argumentation memos from PLSI 150. We will also analyze our latest graduation and retention data as soon as that data becomes available from the office of institutional effectiveness.

**Question #6: What progress have you made on items from your last program review action plan?**

Our last program review found our department to be very strong. There were only a few weak areas. One was in advising, we simply did not do enough of it for the undergraduate students. We are continuing to re-evaluate and change the way we do advising. In the future we will be utilizing, to some degree, our college’s advising center.

The review team felt that our primary method of assessment at the time, analyzing research papers, did not capture all aspects of learning and that we needed more assessment tools. Since then we have added a more knowledge-oriented component in our pre-test / post-test approach, and have also added the analysis of policy memoranda, which is a very different type of writing than research papers.

The lack of diversity was also noted in our review. Since that time we have had two searches and two hires. One new hire was female, and the other was of non-Caucasian ethnic background.