

STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

2008

(as amended Oct. 2008)

1. DEPARTMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESMENT

The student outcomes assessment (SOA) plan for the Political Science Major, Public Administration Major, Political Science Teaching Major and Political Communication Major is intended to evaluate student skills and needs within the department's majors. Through an analysis of these outcomes, we hope to help faculty enhance student learning and improve the department's programs.

Prior to 2001, the Department of Political Science relied on efforts to measure knowledge of a specific set of facts relevant to the discipline through standardized tests. Such tests were costly, time-consuming and due to the selection process used, highly biased. In 2004, the department implemented a new SOA plan designed to assess the skills and competencies required for success in the various fields associated with Political Science. The instruments used were surveys of faculty, students and alumni, along with an annual random assessment of student papers.

Beginning in the fall 2008, the department will implement an overhaul of its SOA plan, fine tuning learning outcomes and changing the instruments used to assess the skills and competencies associated with Political Science.

2. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCES

The specific outcomes and competencies that our 2008 assessment is geared to measure are as follows:

1. Students should be able to explain how to investigate political phenomenon from different theoretical perspectives within the discipline.
2. Students should be able to investigate political phenomena using social scientific approaches. This includes developing empirical questions and hypotheses, using evidence and relating findings and conclusions to broader theories in the field.
3. Students should be familiar with standard sources of information used in the field of Political Science, including US government and international documents & websites, databases, specialized journals, books and other relevant material, and should be able to incorporate basic research using both quantitative and qualitative data into their own work.

4. Students should demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively through their written work.
5. Students should demonstrate critical thinking skills in evaluating ideas and information and in making arguments about political phenomena. Students should be able not only to generate data, but also to discuss what particular data mean for political life. There should be a demonstrated understanding of the difference between analysis and opinion, and a demonstrated ability to critique existing accounts of political phenomena.

3. SPECIFIC METHODS AND FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENTS

The Department of Political Science 2008 SOA procedures include one direct measure of student learning outcomes and two indirect measures of student or alumni satisfaction with department programs:

1. An annual assessment of student writing portfolios phased in during the 2008-2012 period. Beginning in the fall 2008, all students declaring political science or public administration as a major in the department will be required to create and maintain an e-portfolio and to upload all writing assignments to their portfolios for storage.
 - During the senior seminar for political science majors, students will pick six papers from among their writings to submit as their portfolio. These six papers shall consist of: two papers from introductory classes (American, Theory, IR, or Comparative), one paper from Scope and Methods, two papers from advanced classes, and a paper from the senior seminar.
 - During the senior seminar for public administration majors, students will pick six papers from among their writings to submit as their portfolio. These six papers shall consist of: two papers from introductory classes (American Politics, Public Administration), one paper from Scope and Methods, two papers from advanced classes (Public Organizations, Public Budgeting, Public Policy Process, Public Personnel Administration), and a paper from the seminar in Public Administration.
 - Political Communication majors. Curriculum changes are needed to allow for the collection of student portfolios and will be proposed in the curriculum cycle that begins Fall 2008. Majors will be required to take either the Senior Seminar in Political Science or the Senior Seminar in Communication. Portfolios will be compiled in the senior seminar the student chooses. For those political communication students taking the Senior Seminar in Political Science, students will pick six papers from their writings to submit as their portfolio. These six papers shall consist of: two papers from introductory classes (American Politics, International Relations, Mass Comm and Society), one paper from their methods course, two papers from advanced classes (either required or within their focus areas), and a paper from the Senior Seminar.

During the transition period, the department will continue to perform an annual assessment of student writing, using portfolios collected in the senior seminar as a starting point. If limited availability of past student writing causes these portfolios to be insufficient in number or breadth, the department may supplement them with random selections of student writing within Scope & Methods and introductory and advanced subfield courses.

2. An annual student satisfaction survey. The survey will be administered annually through MyUniverse beginning in spring 2007 and students will be notified through email and repeated messages to complete the survey.
3. An alumni survey conducted during the fall semester every four years (last done in 2006). An attempt is made to contact all Political Science alumni irrespective of graduation date.

4. METHODS OF EVALUATING AND INTERPRETING RESULTS

1. The annual assessment of senior seminar and e-portfolio student papers is administered collected and analyzed in the spring semester. Members of the committee will read and evaluate a random selection of papers based on the criteria outlined by the department's Portfolio Paper Evaluation Guidelines. In the fall semester, findings will be presented to the full department. The department will discuss and adopt measures to address issues raised in the evaluation.
2. The student satisfaction survey is administered in the spring semester. Data collected is summarized and interpreted by a member of the SOA committee and presented to the SOA Committee for comment and revision before being presented to the full department in the annual SOA Department Report during the fall. The department will discuss and adopt measure to address issues raised in the survey.
3. An alumni survey is conducted in the Fall semester every four years. A member of the SOA Committee will summarize and interpret the data before presenting it to the SOA Committee for comment and revision. Findings will be presented to the full department in the spring of the following years. The department will discuss and adopt measure to address issues raised in the survey.

5. PROCEDURES FOR MAKING USE OF INFORMATION FROM SOA

1. At the end of the summer, the SOA Committee meets and makes recommendations regarding program and/or curricular improvements to the department based on a review of SOA results.

2. At a department meeting in the early fall, the SOA Committee presents its results and members of the department discuss the recommendations made. After discussion, the department will vote on the recommendations, with or without modifications.
3. At the same meeting, members of the department discuss progress made on previous recommendations and evaluate the need for further modifications or measures to achieve objectives outlined by the SOA Committee in previous reports.