

September 30, 2014

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**Political Science**

Dear Professors Young and Eitle:

First, my apologies for a slightly late report of our assessment process and committee. With all the early semester and back-to-school activities, it just got away from me.

Professor Johnson and I first met and reviewed the current assessment plan and discussed how best to utilize it in light of the current department transition away from an emphasis on the four options carried through to the completion of a student's capstone project. The four options are Political Institutions (primarily American), Political Theory, Policy Analysis, and International Relations. The current assessment plan calls for evaluating students' mastery of one of the four option subfields as indicated by their designing and executing a capstone research project related to one of the options.

Dr. Johnson made the random selection of 8 capstone papers, two from each option. We then independently assessed them in light of the learning outcome associated with each option. (Assessment Plan and outcomes attached.) We then logged out numerical assessments on a four-point scale into the attached table and met second time to consider whether to report the raw results or rectify differences in our assessment. We chose the former since the results were very close and all assessed at a rank of "fair" or higher. We each also added a narrative reflection on our experience assessing and on the overall process. We identified several issues that we believe should be discussed by the faculty at large with an eye to improving the process and fitting it more appropriately to our current curriculum.

Please feel free to bring any questions or concerns to my attention and I will make an effort to answer or resolve them.

Sincerely,

Franke Wilmer, Chair PSCI Assessment Committee

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**Assessment of Student Achievement of Option-Specific Outcomes AY 2013-14**

Outcome	IR 1		IR 2		P 1		P 2		T 1		T 2		IN 1		IN 2	
Institutions													3	4	4	4
Values									3	3	3	3				
World	3	4	2	2												
Process					2	2	2	2								

Johnson narrative

If I understood the guidelines, we are to read 8 papers (two from each option) and assess them on a 1-4 scale with respect to one of the option specific outcomes that students should be able to communicate. My findings are above.

Using this single criteria I found the papers to be adequate in quality with three rated fair, five good, and one excellent. These ratings as a function of writing ability, presentation quality (ability to communicate their ideas in a clear and straightforward manner), and my ability to apply the outcome metric.

Here are some general observations. Students seem not to be able to clearly state the intent of their paper. Given they are writing primarily for their capstone mentor this seems understandable but problematic for an assessment. I look for two features in a paper such as this – clear intent and a relevant literature review/bibliography. Some of these papers lack both. Generally speaking, there is little emphasis given a literature review by students. This is the most serious flaw in most student writing and one I try to address in PSCI 200. One could reasonably ask if students could satisfy our “lower division” outcomes without this skill.

Our threshold for achieving student success is if all students earn a score of “2” or better, these did.

Wilmer narrative

We read two papers from each option and assessed the outcomes according to the description of outcomes for options in the assessment plan developed in 2012 and first applied in 2012-13 AY. This is the second year of assessment. The first year task is to assess students in introductory courses and emphasizes intellectual skills (evaluating conflicting arguments, assembling evidence, analyzing normative concepts, communicating orally, effective writing). These are basic outcomes. The subsequent year assesses option specific mastery of knowledge in International Relations (world politics), Political Theory (values), Public Policy (process), and American Institutions.

We used the four-point scale assessment rubric where 4 corresponds to excellent, 3 to good, 2 to fair and 1 to poor. All scores were fair or better ranked by both faculty members conducting the assessment. I agree that literature reviews have not been emphasized equally for students across options and this should be a topic of discussion among faculty members. I view a literature review as a critical feature in assessing a student’s mastery of an option-specific knowledge base. This would make the papers longer.

There is substantial variation in methodology across the options and that may affect the outcomes. At two ends of the spectrum lie American Institutions, which lends itself to a conventional scientific method of investigating a falsifiable hypothesis, and at the other is political theory where evaluating

conflicting arguments and analyzing normative concepts is central to a theoretical essay. Both policy and international relations appear more as methodological hybrids involving case studies and an assessment of policy objectives and outcomes. These issues should also be discussed by the full faculty in review our first round of year 1 and year 2 assessments ranging from development of intellectual skills to their application to a scholarly or research project that demonstrates their mastery of option-specific knowledge.

## Political Science Assessment Plan

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Year			Target course(s) for Assessment Data
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15*	
Learning Outcome 1	x			PSCI 210
Learning Outcome 2	x			PSCI 230
Learning Outcome 3	x			PSCI 439
Learning Outcome 4	x			PSCI 499R
Learning Outcome 5		x		PSCI 499R
Learning Outcome 6		x		PSCI 499R
Learning Outcome 7		x		PSCI 499R
Learning Outcome 8		x		PSCI 499R

### Learning Outcomes

There are four basic learning outcomes and four specific to the options offered in the Department of Political Science.

*The four basic outcomes are that students should be able to:*

1. Evaluate conflicting arguments;
2. Assemble empirical evidence and analyze normative concepts;
3. Make reasoned conclusions from evidence;
4. Communicate orally and written effectively, credit and cite sources.

*The four option specific outcomes are that students should be able to communicate:*

5. An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions and processes of American government;
6. An understanding of the values, beliefs and ideas that constitute the traditions of Western political thought and the ways in which those values, beliefs and ideas have changed over time;
7. An understanding of the development of contemporary world politics as a site of political engagement among state and non-state actors over economic, social and strategic issues with the potential for both conflict and cooperation;
8. An understanding of the processes by which public policy is developed, implemented and studied within the complex system of stakeholders and institutions that make up the American political landscape.

### **Indicators of Student Achievement of Basic Outcomes**

An Assessment dossier consisting of five documents will be maintained for each student majoring in Political Science. The documents are used to indicate achievement of the outcomes as follows:

1. Evaluate conflicting arguments;
  - a. Written assignments from PSCI 210 American Government
2. Assemble empirical evidence and analyze normative concepts;
  - a. Written assignments from PSCI 230 Introduction to International Relations
3. Make reasoned conclusions from evidence;
  - a. A written assignment from any 300 level course that entails assembling evidence, engaging in analysis of the evidence, and formulating conclusions
4. Communicate orally and written effectively, credit and cite sources
  - a. The capstone paper and oral presentation
  - b. An oral presentation grading sheet

### **Indicators of Student Achievement of Option-Specific Outcomes**

Each year the Departmental Assessment Committee will select between 5 and 10 students including at least one capstone project from each option area.

### **Scoring Rubrics and Thresholds**

Outcomes 1-4 plus the option-specific capstones will be evaluated on a four-point scale as Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (2), or Poor (1). Additionally, the entire dossier will be reviewed and evaluated overall for improvement from assignments completed at the 200 level to the 300 level and capstone with an evaluation of High Level of Improvement (3), Some Improvement (2), or No Improvement (1).

The department will be assessed as achieving student outcomes successfully if all scores for both basic outcomes and overall improvement are in the range of (2) or better.

\* Based on our experience in 2012-13 and 2013-14 we will make improvements to the assessment plan and decide on indicators for 2014-15.