

Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): Political Science

2016-17 Academic Year

A. College, Department, Date

College CAHS
Department Program: Political Science
Date May 29, 2017

B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and title Robert Klotz, Assoc Prof and Chair Dept of HTY & POS

C. Degree Program

Name of Degree Program BA in Political Science

D. Assessment of Student Learning: Program Assessment

Step 1: Identify the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

- a. Do you have your student learning outcomes published on your department's website? Yes
 - i. If yes, please indicate the url: usm.maine.edu/pos/outcomes
 - ii. If no, please list 3-5 of the most important student learning outcomes for your program. **What will students know by the end of your program?**
- b. Please identify **which of your student learning outcome(s) were assessed this past academic year.** (One or more of the outcomes and corresponding assessment plans could come from your department's CORE Course Blueprint(s).

All outcomes are assessed in each class through regular assessments of student performance. The faculty-based Core Curriculum Committee undertakes an

ongoing assessment of achievement of student outcomes through its system that designates which courses fulfill the various core curriculum requirements. Systematic program-wide assessments are gained through anonymous student self-assessments.

- c. *Do you have a **matrix or curriculum map** showing when your student learning outcomes are assessed and in which courses? No*
 - i. *If yes, do you have this map published on your website? Please indicate url or attach a copy of the curriculum map.*

Step 2: Assessment Methods Selected and Implemented

- d. *Identify which direct measures (other than course grades), that were used to determine whether students achieved the stated learning outcomes for the degree.*

Performance tests, papers, class presentations, individual or group projects, research studies, internships, systematic student self-assessments.

While most assessment is tailored to the individual course, the program also has access to systematic data across all courses. This systematic data takes the form of student self-assessments at the end of the semester. As adult learners, students are well-positioned to assess whether learning outcomes are achieved.

- e. *Briefly describe when you implemented the assessment activity, and if a scoring rubric was used to evaluate the expected level of student achievement. (This information may be shown on your curriculum map).*

Faculty members are dedicated to ensuring that learning outcomes are realized. Assignments are given regularly throughout the semester in all classes. Scoring rubrics are routinely used by faculty to measure learning outcome achievement and promote unbiased assessment. To allow for variation in course content, instructor style, and student progress, scoring rubrics will necessarily vary by course. While recognizing this diversity, program faculty share a commitment to incorporating effective writing and applying evidence into scoring rubrics across courses. Student self-assessments, which are one component of a broader course evaluation process, are done at the end of the semester.

Step 3: Using the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning

- a. *Briefly describe your unit's process of reviewing the program assessment results (i.e. annual process by faculty committee, etc).*

Individual faculty members are continuously striving to improve learning outcomes and respond to ongoing circumstances in the individual course. Systematic data are examined through personnel review and program meetings.

In combination with the high performance observed in individual courses, the systematic results of student self-assessments provide strong evidence of student achievement of learning outcomes in the political science program. Over 650 students filled out self-assessments over the period Fall 2014-Fall 2016. Assessments were obtained for all political science courses. Students are asked to rank their courses on a scale of 1 to 5 with 3 being average and 5 being the highest quality. Student self-assessments provide evidence that learning outcomes are being achieved. This can be seen clearly for each learning outcome:

- 1) Students will have knowledge of the fundamental ideas and theories of American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, and political methodology – All political science majors are required to take five introductory courses (POS 101 American Politics, POS 104 International Relations, POS 203 Research Methods, POS 205 Comparative Politics, POS 290 Political Theory) to gain knowledge of the fundamentals of the major subfields of political science. Completion of the introductory course prepares students for upper-level work in the subfield as part of the program's carefully sequenced course work. A product of multiple assessment activities, a final grade of C- or better in each of the five introductory classes is required to demonstrate basic competence in the subfield. Successful achievement of this learning outcome is also supported by student self-assessments across all political science courses. Students were asked about whether the "ideas and theories" of the discipline were made "clear" to them. On a 1 to 5 scale, the mean was 4.39 and over 85% said that clarity was above average. 63% of students gave the course the highest score for its ability to convey knowledge of ideas and theories in the discipline. 7% rated the course average; only 7% rated the course below average.

- 2) Students will develop analytical and research skills that can be applied to situations in the classroom and community – Analytical skills are central to political science courses. Symbolic of the program's commitment to analytical

skills is that our POS 101 American Government, POS 102 People and Politics, POS 104 International Relations, and POS 205 Comparative Politics fulfill the socio-cultural analysis requirement of the university's core curriculum. This designation was a result of careful determination by the Core Curriculum Committee that the courses meet the learning outcomes for socio-cultural analysis. As stated by the Committee, these outcomes included that students will "have knowledge of one or more socio-cultural systems over time or across the world; employ one or more conceptual frameworks and understand one or more disciplinary methods that shed light on human behaviors in social contexts; describe ethical issues and the effects of behaviors associated with relevant public and private roles students may experience; describe how conflicts in the world develop from differing interpretations of events over time or across cultures; demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis." Political science students also apply skills to community-based problems in a number of internships. Students see the relevance of the analytical skills that they are developing. In their self-assessments, students were asked whether they are able to "apply concepts." Over 80% of students described their political science course as above average in this regard with a program mean of 4.23.

3) Students will demonstrate excellent written and oral communication skills through a variety of writing tasks and oral presentations in the classroom and other appropriate venues – Writing is an important component in every political science course. The written essay is the median assessment instrument in political science courses. Classroom presentations are a regular course component. Professional judgments by faculty about high student achievement of learning outcomes is supported by student self-assessments. Students across all political science courses were asked, "Did you develop significant skills in the field as a result of taking this course?" Over two-thirds of students said that their acquisition of skills was above the average course with a mean of 3.86.

4) Students will improve the critical thinking ability that enables them to be productive citizens and workers by thinking for themselves while respecting the views of others – Critical thinking skills are measured through regular assessment activities that require oral and written communication about ideas presented in class and the readings. Further, engagement with primary documents is a regular activity in almost all upper-level political science courses and in the introductory political theory course. The effectiveness of political science courses in achieving this outcome is supported by the designation of the Core Curriculum Committee that POS 104 International Relations, POS 280 Issues

before the United Nations, and POS 334 Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Politics fulfill the diversity requirement. As stated by the Committee, courses that fulfill the diversity requirement achieve the learning outcomes that students will “recognize that one’s individual viewpoint is shaped by his or her experience and historical and cultural context, and is only one of many possible viewpoints; apply conceptual frameworks to explain and analyze the origins of difference; analyze the consequences of difference as manifested in systems of power, the production of knowledge and/or access to resources in the U.S. and/or in global cultures; engage in respectful dialog that values diversity, while recognizing forces that promote misunderstanding and disrespect; demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis.” Political science courses have been found to improve critical thinking. Students were asked whether their political science courses facilitated the outcome of being able to “think for themselves.” Over 80% rated the course above average on this dimension with a mean of 4.28. Additionally, students were asked whether an experience in civic dialogue was achieved by being asked “How open was the instructor to other viewpoints.” Over 80% of students rated the course above average with a mean of 4.38.

5) Students will learn and practice quantitative analytical skills while producing reports on real political research cases concerning current issues in the realm of politics, economics, and society – Students are required to take POS 203 Introduction to Political Science Research, which is focused on quantitative analysis. USM Political Science offers the only quantitative political science research methods course in the University of Maine System. Students gain valuable analytical skills to use in a world in which decisions are increasingly informed by quantitative data. Assessment includes myriad exercises that require students to apply knowledge to real world cases. A central part of assessment is to present students with real world quantitative information and challenge them to interpret the data. Evidence of learning is shown in future classes across the curriculum as students who have taken the methods course are better able to confront complex material because they have an understanding of the underlying methodology. Further, by learning statistical software, students are empowered to do their own problem solving in future classes and workplaces. Successful achievement of this outcome is also supported by previously referenced student self-assessments showing that significant skills are gained through the political science curriculum.

- b. *What specific changes have been or will be made to improve student learning, as a result of using the program assessment results?*

Every class session is an opportunity to improve student learning. Our professional faculty respond to student needs to maximize student learning in each session of each course.

- c. *Date of most recent program review/self-study?*

2011-12

E..Course Assessment Activities: *Is your program able to report any assessment-related activities at the Course-Level... (i.e. created grading rubrics to use in required courses, examined student progress in entry-level courses, developed a new course, etc)? Please briefly explain any assessment projects.*

Political science faculty regularly introduce new courses that promote learning outcomes and ensure student engagement with contemporary advancements in the discipline. In Fall 2016, the new course POS 355 Race and the Politics of Mass Incarceration was incorporated into the catalog. The course allows students to engage with contemporary criminal justice issues while developing critical thinking and communication skills. In Spring 2017, the new course POS 399 Year in Life was offered as an experimental course for the second time. The course provides a valuable research-based capstone option that integrates historical and political analysis.

The international relations curriculum under the outstanding leadership of Tim Ruback has instituted a variety of new assessment practices. He has incorporated a service learning component into POS 104 International Relations in which students work about 15 hours in an international aid organization during the course. Workplace supervisors are given a role in assessment, which is supported by student reflective writing and course discussion. His work directing the signature USM Maine Model United Nations program benefits from assessment by high school teachers involved in the program who provide feedback to both the high school students and USM student team leaders.

F. Community Engagement Activities in your departmental curriculum:

a. Does your department have a student learning outcome that is related to any community engagement activities? If so, please state the outcome.

Students will develop analytical and research skills that can be applied to situations in the classroom and community.

b. Please indicate if any of the community engagement activities listed below are included in your program’s curriculum, by noting which activities are required or optional for students in your major.

<u>Community Engagement Activity</u>	<u>Required/Optional</u>
Student Research (related to a community-based problem)	O
Student-Faculty Community Research Project	O
Internship, or a Field Experience	O
Independent Study (community-related project)	O
Capstone Course (community-related project)	O
Service-Learning (course-based)	O
Study Abroad, or an International Program	O
Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related)	O
Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project)	O
Students/Faculty Community Leadership (advisory boards, committees, conference presentations)	O
<p>Other Activities (not mentioned above): In addition to these optional activities incorporated into a range of political science courses, the Political Science Program administers the largest single service learning and community engagement program at USM, the Maine Model United Nations Program. The program brings 600 junior high school and high school students and some of their teachers from around the state of Maine to spend several days and nights on the USM campus participating in a simulated United Nations experience.</p>	

c. Please list any courses (i.e. EDU 400) that have a community engagement activity in your program.

Entry-level courses: POS 104 (Ruback version)

Mid-level courses: POS 280 (engage in national community with conference); POS 299

Upper-level courses: POS 355; POS 445; POS 446; POS 475; POS 476 (in DC community); POS 480