

Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): Academic Programs

2018-19 Academic Year

University of Southern Maine

Reminder: All Department/Program Chairs are responsible for completing an ASLP form by the end of this academic year for each academic program in your department. This campus-wide (annual) form is used to document the ongoing program assessment activities in each department/program. The form was designed to align with the NECHE (New England Commission of Higher Education) accreditation- assessment standards.

*If you have questions about this form, or need assistance with your program assessment plans, please contact Susan King, Director of Academic Assessment, 780-4681, susank@maine.edu. **Please email this form by May 31, 2019.***

A. College, Department, Date

College CAHS
Department Program: Political Science
Date May 16, 2019

B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and title Robert Klotz, Associate Professor and POS Program Chair

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. Are your student learning outcomes published on your department's website?

Yes

- i. If yes, please provide 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.**

During the 2018-19 academic year, outcomes were assessed in each class through regular assessments of student performance. The faculty-based Core Curriculum Committee conducted 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 were 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? Yes

- i. If yes, do you have this map published on your website? Please provide the url or attach a copy of the curriculum map.

Table 1: Curriculum Map: Priority of Teaching and Assessing Program Outcomes in Required Courses

Outcome	Low	High
Students will have knowledge of the fundamental ideas and theories of American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, and political methodology.		101, 104, 203, 205, 290
Students will develop analytical and research skills that can be applied to situations in the classroom and community.		101, 104, 203, 205, 290
Students will demonstrate excellent written and oral communication skills through a variety of writing tasks and oral presentations in the classroom and other appropriate public venues (e.g., student conferences).		101, 104, 203, 205, 290
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.		101, 104, 203, 205, 290
Students will learn and practice quantitative analytical skills while producing reports on real political science research cases concerning current issues in the realm of politics, economics and society.	101, 104, 205, 290	203

Step 2: Assessment Methods Selected and Implemented

- a. Identify which assessment measures (beyond individual student grading) were used to determine whether students achieved the stated learning outcomes for the degree. (NOTE: Many undergraduate programs are using their recently approved Capstone courses to assess student learning. Assessment plans included in your

Capstone Proposal in the CCC may be referred to as examples of assessment work in your program.)

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.

- b. *Briefly describe when you implemented the assessment activity; if a rubric or other structured approach was used to assess student outcome achievement, please describe and/or attach the rubric.*

Example: Outcome 1 was measured during the fall semester -- all majors completed a problem-solving case study during the ___course. Case studies were graded on a rubric by two faculty members.

Example: Outcome 2 was measured during the spring semester -- all majors in the capstone course completed a research project. Research projects will be reviewed and graded by a group of faculty.

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 (for example, annual discussion 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 one thousand (n=1088 for overall instructor rating) students filled out self-assessments in the most recent four-year period for which data have been provided (January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2018). 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 4.32 and over 80% said that clarity was above average. 61% of students gave the course the highest score for its ability to convey knowledge of ideas and theories in the discipline. Approximately 9% rated the course average; only 8% 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 78% of students described their political science course as above average in this regard with a program mean of 4.21. Additional program-wide empirical evidence that this outcome is being realized comes from the Office of Academic Assessments Fall 2017 Undergraduate Report on Student Outcomes and Experiences in Political Science which reports that 77% of students have already completed or plan to complete an internship or other field experience. Since POS does not require an internship, students who will benefit less from an internship can pursue other options including study abroad, which is the plan of 46% students in the major according to the same report.

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?” Two-thirds of students said that their acquisition of skills was above the average course with a mean of 3.87.

In the 2018-19 academic year, an assessment project was undertaken to improve measurement of foreign language proficiency for students in the

International Studies Track. During the 2018-19 academic year, program faculty evaluated and extensively discussed how to assess whether students are building written and oral communication skills in a foreign language. The result of this evaluation was the establishment of clear test score benchmarks for students who do not meet the foreign language requirement through coursework. The same assessment project also identified more foreign language courses that will count toward the major.

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 79% rated the course above average on this dimension with a mean of 4.27. 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 4.39.

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.

One new quantitative option for students is POS 102 People and Politics. The effectiveness of POS 102 in achieving this outcome is supported by the Spring 2018 decision of the Core Curriculum Committee that the course fulfills the “Quantitative Reasoning” requirement of the Core Curriculum. As stated by the Committee, the “Quantitative Reasoning” designation is for courses in which students achieve outcomes including being able to “[a]pply appropriate and correct numerical computation and technology to decision making.”

- b. *Identify the specific changes that have been or will be made to improve student learning based on these program assessment results. (For example, what changes will the program make at the assignment, course, or program level to improve student learning, based on the 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. Recent changes at the macro-level include POS 102 People and Politics seeking and receiving the Core Curriculum’s “Quantitative Reasoning” designation in Spring 2018 in part to strengthen

achievement and assessment of Outcome #5 (build quantitative skills). Another recent change was to allow students the opportunity for an accelerated 4+1 Masters in Policy degree. This change supports Outcome #2 in which students will apply research skills to the community. The 2019-20 catalog will incorporate the change in measuring non-coursework proficiency in foreign language for students in the International Studies Track, which supports outcome #3 of demonstrating written and oral communication skills.

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

2011-2012

E. Other Assessment Activities: *Briefly describe any additional assessment-related activities your program is using at the course level (for example, creating common assignments and/or assignment rubrics for use across different sections of required courses, examining student progress in entry-level courses, other assessment projects implemented by individual faculty, etc.).*

Political science faculty also regularly introduce new courses that promote learning outcomes and ensure student engagement with contemporary advancements in the discipline. In Spring 2019, the new course POS 399 Machiavelli was offered as an experimental course for the first time. The course provides a valuable research-based capstone option that integrates historical, theoretical, and political analysis. In Fall 2018, a new version of POS 102 People and Politics was offered for the first time. The course was assessed by the Core Curriculum Committee to meet the expectations of a course in quantitative reasoning.

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. Evidence of success of the Model United Nations Program is its continued growth to nearly 600 high school and junior high students. Students and teachers are assessing the program as successful in achieving the outcome of improving critical thinking by encouraging students to think for themselves while respecting the views of others. The Model United Nations program has a well-established record of success as the largest service-learning program at the University of Southern Maine.

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)	<input type="radio"/>
Student-Faculty Community Research Project	<input type="radio"/>
Internship, or a Field Experience	<input type="radio"/>
Independent Study (community-related project)	<input type="radio"/>
Capstone Course (community-related project)	<input type="radio"/>
Service-Learning (course-based)	<input type="radio"/>
Study Abroad, or an International Program	<input type="radio"/>
Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related)	<input type="radio"/>
Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project)	<input type="radio"/>
Students/Faculty Community Leadership (e.g., advisory boards, committees, conference presentations)	<input type="radio"/>
Other activities (please list):	<input type="radio"/>

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

Entry-level courses: POS 104 (Ruback select versions)

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

Upper-level courses: POS 355; POS 410; POS 445; POS 446; POS 475; POS 476 (in DC); POS 480

Reminder: Please complete and submit this form by May 31, 2019.