

**Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving
*Student Learning in Degree Programs***

Unit: Department of Political Science

Unit Head approval:
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Professor and Head

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SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.

Graduate

In response to past assessment results, the Department has implemented two changes to improve the quality of the graduate program. The first was to restructure the second-year review process. The second-year review is an important element of the graduate program because it provides a formal assessment of whether each student is making satisfactory progress toward the PhD. Under the restructured plan, the second-year review process has been centralized in an effort to ensure uniform standards of review. Each student's record is reviewed by a committee comprised of the field heads for each of the five major subfields in the discipline. This committee is responsible for determining whether students are making satisfactory progress and whether their funding should continue. A three-person advisory committee (selected by each student in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies), then meets with each student to discuss their future plans concerning coursework, qualifying examinations, and dissertation research.

The Department has also implemented changes with respect to graduate recruitment. Attracting high-quality graduate students is essential to the success of any graduate program. To improve our chances of successfully recruiting such students, the Department has increased the size of its funding packages. In particular, the Department uses a portion of its fellowship money to augment the amount provided by a conventional assistantship. To increase its chances of attracting the very best prospects, the Department also tries, when possible, to match the offers made by competing institutions.

Undergraduate

In addition to systematic collection data considered in annual reviews, the department has produced the following other analyses:

1. 2007 Probation Survey.

Assessment Results: Over Spring and Fall, 2007, the Department conducted a survey of majors placed on academic probation by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Key findings included: over a third of students in this population have “relationship,” “health,” “financial,” or “job” related issues in addition to academic problems; about half of these students recognize that they have a “difficult” schedule by the semester drop deadline (only one-third recognize that difficulty at the beginning of the semester); and, mostly, students winding up on academic probation don’t talk about their academic problems with anyone - except other students – during the semester leading to the probation.

Unit Responses: After the preliminary results were reported, the Department made several changes. (1) The Department began to place a registration hold on students with probationary status. The hold is removed when the student has self-identified reasons for poor academic performance and met with an academic advisor for appropriate campus referrals. (2) The Department identifies students with low grade point averages excessive credit hours or advanced hours *before* the beginning of the Spring and Fall semesters. (3) Orientation meetings now include some discussion for incoming or transfer students about what steps they should take when they or other students face academic difficulties.

2. 2007 Illinois-in-Washington Program Evaluation and Remediation Report on PS 390: American Foreign Policy in SU07

Assessment Results: At the conclusion of the inaugural, short term, visit to Washington course, the Department conducted a review of this experience involving an interview with the responsible faculty member, a survey of students in the class and a review of the budget and program expenditures. Key findings include: concerns about the comparability of this remote course to on-campus versions of this class; problems with program organization and communication; and student dislike of selected academic and student life programming choices.

Unit Action: The Department responded to this report in a variety of ways that included re-structuring the Illinois-in-Washington Program and archiving the results of this study for use in future courses.

3. 2008 Illinois-in-Washington Site Visit

Assessment Results: The Department conducted an on-site review of the nascent Illinois-in-Washington Program under the direction of an interim supervisor. The assessment involved conversations with Washington-area instructors, the internship/student life coordinator and students. Key findings: Students were safe, well and learning on their internships. Students did have a complaint about the way credit was awarded for their internships.

Unit Responses: The findings were reported. Students complaints were addressed in a letter.

4. 2007 Pre-Law Report

Assessment Results: In Spring, 2007, Assistant Dean Steven Shafer prepared a report on pre-law advising with a special appendix on students from the Department of Political Science. **Key findings:** 17.7% (63) of the successful law school applicants on this campus majored in political science; virtually all political science majors with a grade point average above 3.0 and an LSAT score above the median gain admittance to law school.

Unit Response: The results were disseminated to departmental advisors to offer appropriate guidance to students in their selection of courses and preparation for life after college.

5. 2006 Senior Thesis Study

Assessment Results: In September, 2006, the Department examined the numbers and characteristics of students completing a senior thesis in political science over the period, 2001-2006. **Key finding:** about 2.5% of graduating political science majors complete senior theses.

Unit Responses: After the preliminary report, an Ad Hoc Committee on Senior Theses reviewed the department policy on senior theses and compared it to similar units in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The Committee produced a report – now before the departmental curriculum committee – suggesting changes in the senior thesis requirements. On an interim basis, the Department has established a senior thesis writing seminar to assist seniors wanting to write a senior thesis. In addition, the department has designated a series of “Challenge Courses,” more demanding than other courses, in which high GPA second and third year students are invited to participate. The object of both the senior thesis seminar and the challenge courses is preparing our best students to write successful, high-quality senior theses.

6. 2006 Recertification of Advanced Composition Courses Offered by the Department of Political Science

Assessment Results: This report concerned compliance of department courses with content requirements specified by the Senate Committee on General Education. **Key finding:** A review of course syllabi indicates compliance of political science courses with course delivery and writing requirements for advanced composition courses.

Unit Action: The Department reported its compliance.

7. AY 2006-2007 Program Review Report / PS-IS Enrollment Study, February 2008; PS-IS Enrollment Study, August, 2006

Assessment Results: This series of reports involved examination of enrollment statistics and concerned the utilization of seats in political science classes by students in the growing international studies major. **Key finding:** The number of international studies students in political science courses exceeded that for students in any other major except political science.

Unit Response: In conjunction with the Assistant Dean for International Studies, the Department sought and obtained additional funds for instruction of international studies majors in advanced and intermediate political science classes.

8. 2005 Recertification of Social Science General Education Courses / February, 2006 Response to Questions About Social Science General Education Courses Offered by Department of Political Science

Assessment Results: These two reports concern compliance of department courses with content requirements specified by the Senate Committee on General Education. **Key findings:** A review of course syllabi indicates substantial compliance of political science courses with communication skill development and methodological content requirements for social sciences general education courses.

Unit Action: As a result of this study, the Department reported the compliance of the bulk of its social science general education courses with campus requirements. Also, it observed for the committee that one of its courses no longer appeared to meet these campus requirements.

9. On-going: Minor Modification Study

Assessment Result: From January, 2004 to present, the department has collected and periodically reviewed minor modification forms submitted for students seeking a minor in political science. **Key findings:** The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was inappropriately denying credit for minors in political science because of the College's reliance on an out-of-date program of study guidelines.

Unit Response: Provision of and insistence upon an up-to-date program of study for the minor.

10. On-going: Advisor Perception Survey

Assessment Result: At the conclusion of advising interviews, students anonymously complete an "Advisor Perception Survey." **Key findings:** By an overwhelming margin, students who meet with political science advisors are pleased with the experience. Occasional reports of high level of dissatisfaction.

Unit Response: Survey results are reviewed monthly for each advisor. Patterns of satisfaction or dissatisfaction are discussed.

SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

(a) **PROCESS**: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.

The original Political Science Assessment Plan was initially drafted collectively by the then Acting Head (Paul F. Diehl), Director of Graduate Studies (Michael Krassa), and Director of Undergraduate Studies (Stephen Douglas). After review by various departmental committees, the Head prepared and submitted the final version of the document at the beginning of this decade. The revised plan has been developed in a similar process, by a different head (William Bernhard), a different Director of Graduate Studies (Thomas Rudolph) and a different Director of Undergraduate Studies (Joseph Hinchliffe).

(b) **STUDENT OUTCOMES**: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).

(Kindly refer to the copy of the revised assessment plan appended to this document.)

SECTION 3 : PLANS FOR USING RESULTS

(a) **PLANS**: Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.

Typically, assessment studies have come about as a result of particular administrative needs or departmental concerns. At present, there are four outstanding reports in development:

1. A study of course prerequisites and their effects on student performance in advanced-level courses.
2. A study on utilization of undergraduate advising, course and post-college planning.
3. A study on senior theses – given the preliminary steps already taken by the department.

4. A study of a large-lecture, PS 101, taught without teaching assistant led discussion sections, as compared to classes taught in a traditional, lecture, discussion section format.

These or other indicated studies will be prepared by the Directors of Undergraduate Studies and/or the Director of Graduate Studies, respectively and as appropriate, and disseminated to the Head, and if appropriate, to the departmental committees for such action as is appropriate. Without knowing the results of the studies in advance, identification of more specific plans is not appropriate.

(b) **TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

The prerequisite study will be completed in Summer, 2008, and disseminated to the Head and faculty further action as appropriate – including building consensus for further study of the matter.

The study on utilization of undergraduate advising will take place in Fall, 2008. Changes in information distributed to students could take place quite quickly – as early as Spring or Fall, 2009. Changes in the structure of advising, if appropriate, may take more time to implement and may require experimentation.

Preliminary studies on senior thesis and the change in lecture format will probably not be completed until Summer, 2009.

GRADUATE PROGRAM

Desired Learning Outcomes

The Political Science graduate program is designed to produce broadly educated and well-trained scholars and teachers. Our aim is to produce PhDs who have the breadth and vision to grapple with large questions, the training to make original contributions to those questions, and the ability to communicate research results to students, their peers, and society at large. We thus strive to strike an appropriate balance between (1) exposure to theoretical models in political and social research, (2) sophisticated training in the methods and techniques of social science, (3) the development of expertise within a student's primary area of interest, and (4) exposure to classroom teaching. More specifically, every Illinois Ph.D. should:

(1) Be well grounded in the social sciences. This includes a familiarity with philosophy of science issues that underlie social scientific inquiry. It also includes an exposure to or an acquaintance with the literature and approaches of at least one other discipline as they pertain to inquiries in political science and specifically to students' specific areas of interest.

(2) Be familiar with the breadth and diversity of models, approaches, and intellectual traditions within a student's major subfield of expertise.

(3) Be competent in at least a second substantive area of political science.

(4) Be highly competent in research skills appropriate to his or her research endeavors. An Illinois Ph.D. should be exposed to a broad range of methodologies (including both quantitative and qualitative approaches) and have some familiarity with other sets of research skills (e.g. statistical analysis, formal modeling, game theory).

(5) Fully understand the research enterprise. This includes an ability to critique others' work and an ability to be a contributing scholar by producing original research.

(6) Be adequately prepared to teach graduate courses in his or her primary subfield and undergraduate courses in at least two subfields of the discipline.

Given inherently limited resources (financial, research expertise, etc.), the graduate program cannot serve multiple audiences, prepare students for diverse careers, or provide doctoral training in all areas of the discipline - except at the cost of mediocrity. Consequently, the graduate program must strive to achieve only what it can do well. We thus believe that:

(1) The primary focus of the graduate program should be to train doctoral students for the academic job market.

(2) Students must be prepared for research *and* teaching careers. The distinction between "teaching" and "research" academic institutions is increasingly less tenable. Furthermore, there should be a synergistic effect between good teaching and good research.

(3) The graduate program must reflect the areas of emphasis within the Department as a whole. That is, admissions decisions, course offerings, and examination areas must reflect those areas. These areas should (1) reflect the areas in which the department and its students can excel nationally and internationally, (2) be defined broadly to maintain flexibility, meet student needs, and maximize contributions from the faculty, and (3) include areas within *and* across subfields.

Outcome Assessment Methods, and Timing and Process of Implementation

Assessing quality of performance at the graduate level is qualitatively different than assessing it at the undergraduate level. The graduate program is much smaller in size. Interactions between faculty and students are more involved but take place at more irregular intervals. The length of time to degree is typically longer and, above all, the program mission and goals are markedly different. Assessing quality of outcomes at the graduate level requires a broad range of indicators. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and the Graduate Program Committee review, on a yearly basis, these indicators and benchmarks in order to assess the achievement of program goals and make necessary adjustments. The DGS makes a yearly report to the Head on these matters and recommends needed changes. In accordance with Graduate College guidelines, the Department has already implemented many assessment measures in prior reviews. By the end of the 2008 – 2009 academic year, the review process will be amended to incorporate all of the assessment indicators listed below.

(1) Recruitment: Attracting and retaining quality graduate students are an essential component of building and sustaining a superior graduate program. As a means of monitoring the quality of graduate recruitment, the Department will assess the following indicators on an annual basis:

(a) Percent of admitted students who visit UIUC

(b) Percent of admitted students who enroll at UIUC

(c) Percent of students who visited who enroll at UIUC

(d) GRE scores for domestic and international students admitted to UIUC

(e) GRE scores for domestic and international students who enroll at UIUC

(f) Percent of decliners who enroll at a higher or lower ranked graduate program than UIUC

(2) Performance of Students in Graduate Program: The Department of Political Science has instituted several benchmarks to monitor whether graduate students are making satisfactory progress toward the desired learning outcomes detailed above. These benchmarks include:

(a) GPA: A student's cumulative great point average is one useful indicator of whether performance in courses is satisfactory. Students whose GPA falls below an unacceptable level (i.e. 3.0) are placed on academic probation. In accordance with Graduate College guidelines, such students are given one additional semester in which to meet the minimum GPA standard.

(b) Second Year Reviews: The Department has instituted a formal review process to assess whether graduate students are making satisfactory progress toward their degree. This two-stage review process takes place at the close of each student's second year in the program. In the first stage of the review, students are asked to submit a copy of their transcript, a research statement, and a writing sample to a committee comprised of the area heads for each of the five subfields in the discipline. These five faculty remembers assess students are taking appropriate steps toward achieving the desired learning outcomes and whether they continue in the program. In the second stage of the review, students meet with an advisory committee comprised of three scholars in the student's field of interest. This advisory committee provides feedback on students' progress and helps the student map out a plan for the future.

(c) Preliminary Exams: One of the most important indicators of whether graduate students are meeting the desired learning outcomes is their qualifying exams. Students cannot receive their PhD without first demonstrating that they have mastered two substantive areas of political science. Qualifying exams provide a direct measure of whether students have accomplished this goal. Each student must satisfactorily complete two qualifying exams, one in their general field and a second in a more specialized field. Performance is assessed by a committee of three faculty members chosen by the head of each field. As part of the exam process, students must be able to demonstrate their mastery of the material in both written and oral form.

(d) Dissertation Defense: One of the most important desired learning outcomes is that students demonstrate an ability to complete a significant piece of original research. To meet this requirement, each student must successfully complete a written dissertation and defend it orally before a committee of four faculty members, at least one of which must be outside the student's field of research. Only after satisfying this final outcome are students able to receive their PhD.

(3) Professional Development: As noted above, achievement of desired learning outcomes can be assessed through formal benchmarks such as GPA, second year reviews, qualifying exams, and the dissertation defense. But there are also a number of informal indicators that can be used to assess students' progress toward achieving these benchmarks. These indicators are particularly useful for assessing students' level of professional development and research accomplishments. They reflect, in part, the success or failure of our program in producing professional researchers.

- (a) Percent of students receiving competitive national and international grants.
- (b) Percent of students receiving competitive college and university grants or fellowships.
- (c) Percent of students delivering papers at significant national or international conferences.
- (d) Percent of students publishing articles in professional refereed journals.

(4) Teaching Performance: Another critical objective of our graduate program is to produce students that will be capable and effective teachers at the college level. To assess students' progress toward achieving this goal, we monitor the following indicators on an annual basis.

- (a) ICES Score evaluations for graduate students who serve as teaching assistants or who teach a class as an independent instructor, particularly ratings for quality of instruction
- (b) Percent of students who receive a Graduate Teaching Certificate for successfully completing the university's Teaching Academy
- (c) Percent of students who receive departmental, college, or campus teaching awards

(5) Completion: The quality of the graduate program can also be assessed by examining the percentage of students who successfully complete the program. Successful completion can be defined in a number of ways. It can be measured in terms of earning a degree, securing a job, and expressing satisfaction with the instruction received in the graduate program.

- (a) Percent of enrolled students who receive their PhD within their authorized term.
- (b) Our Department has recently participated in the Graduate College's PhD Completion Project, an initiative designed to assess the attitudes of degree completers and non-completers. Evaluation of exit surveys completed by degree completers will enable us to assess students' degree of satisfaction with the future and sense of preparedness for the future. Specific instruments are available from the Graduate College.
- (c) Evaluation of exit surveys completed by non-completers provides equally useful information because it enables us to monitor the attitudes of those students who did not

successfully complete the PhD program. Their responses can potentially help us detect some of the pitfalls and obstacles that may lead to early termination of the program.

(6) Comparative Performance: Any outcomes assessment must address the performance of our graduate program relative to our peer institutions. Other CIC institutions are primary competitors for students and are generally regarded as peer institutions. The Department regularly shares information with the CIC and uses several comparative measures as benchmarks.

- (a) Average GPA of incoming graduate students
- (b) Average GRE scores of incoming graduate students
- (c) Rank among CIC departments for average GPA of incoming students
- (d) Rank among CIC departments for average GRE of incoming students
- (e) Percent of students who secure a tenure-track job within three years of receiving PhD
- (f) Rank among CIC departments for placement percentage
- (g) Quality of initial job placements compared to other CIC departments

(7) Post-Graduate Outcomes: In some ways, the relative success of our graduate program cannot be assessed fully without observing certain outcomes that occur only after students receive their degrees. Accordingly, we track a number of indicators after students graduate.

- (a) Percent of students who published work from their graduate training in refereed journals, university presses, or other quality outlets
- (b) Percent of graduates who, within five years, have been placed in a position whom the department considers to be appropriate for the program
- (c) Percent of graduates in alumni evaluations who report that their education adequately prepared them for their present position
- (d) Percent of graduates in alumni evaluations who report that their position is closely related to their field of study in graduate school.

The Civic Leadership Program

The Program in Civic Leadership, a brand new program, is an integral part of the Center for the Study of Democratic Governance at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This program has an academic component, a practicum component, and a capstone experience (i.e., a two-semester Practicum in Civic Leadership sequence).

The academic component of the program is administered by the Department of Political Science. This program begins in the third year of undergraduate study and culminates in a Master of Arts degree in Political Science after one year of graduate work. The practicum component is run by the Department, but in conjunction with the Senior Fellows Center for the Study of Democratic Governance.

Desired Outcomes:

The academic component of this program is designed to provide students with:

- (1) a broad perspective on the problems and challenges facing American society in the twenty-first century,
- (2) a better understanding of democratic institutions and processes, and
- (3) the analytic tools, communication skills and ethical bearings needed to assume a leadership role in civic affairs.

The practicum component of the program is designed to help students:

- (1) explore, develop, apply and defend their personal value commitments,
- (2) use, develop and refine essential analytic and communication skills, and
- (3) gain concrete insights into the world of civic affairs.

Outcome Assessment Methods

(1) Performance of Students in this Program

(a) Graduate Admission Reviews. CLP students are “admitted” to this program twice: once as undergraduates and again as graduate students. Part of the admission process is review of academic progress – including grade point averages – and graduate record exam results.

(b) Internship Placement and Performance. CLP students need to complete an internship as part of the program. Acceptance of students into more competitive internships is a mark of program success.

(c) Examination of Program White Papers. CLP students need to complete a paper for their practicum. These projects can be reviewed and assessed as indications of student learning and program quality.

(2) Post-Graduate Outcomes. The relative success of this program must be assessed, in part, by observing the performance of students after graduation. In this sense, program assessment should consider:

(a) The number and percentage of students, within five years after graduation, with appropriate or outstanding placements; and

(b) The social or political impact of program graduates, within five years of their graduation.

Undergraduate Program

Desired Learning Outcomes

The Political Science undergraduate program serves many kinds of students. It is an academic home to political science majors, a way station to political science minors, and part of the journey for students who take political science courses to fulfill curricular requirements or to satiate general interests about politics and political science. Student learning objectives include:

1. Understanding of structures and processes of American government commensurate with citizenship duties and an effective civil society.
2. Acquiring a high degree of familiarity with a broad range of political systems (including the global political order) and cultural perspectives.
3. Developing effective written and communication skills.
4. Enhancing the ability of students to conceptualize problems and apply analytical tools to solve them.
5. Exposing majors to at least three of the subfields of political science, including at least one non-U.S.

For these objectives, the program has the following goals:

1. Offering a comprehensive selection of courses across a broad range of subject matters.
2. Providing high quality instruction across departmental offerings.
3. Supporting structured educational extracurricular experiences (internship, in service learning).
4. Allowing majors the opportunity to choose coursework that is relatively concentrated across a wide range of disciplinary sub-fields.
5. Requiring at least one upper division course organized and taught as a seminar and involving a substantial writing project.

6. Facilitating unstructured extra-classroom opportunities to learn about politics.
7. Rewarding excellent student performance with travel grants, scholarships, honorary society activity, and other recognition.
8. Providing academic advice on all aspects of the major.

Assessment Methods, and Timing and Process of Implementation

A. General

Periodically, the Department will review its undergraduate program. These reviews will be conducted by *ad hoc* review committees composed of the Director of Undergraduate Studies, faculty members, academic staff or undergraduate students, as appropriate, as appointed by the Head- who will present their findings to the Head and/or other departmental committees or the entire faculty, as appropriate. Thereafter, the Head, the Director, or designated faculty and staff will implement required changes.

B. Specific

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUGS) and the Undergraduate Program Committee will review, on at least a yearly basis, a series of different indicators and benchmarks in order to assess the achievement of program goals and make necessary adjustments.

Undergraduate Program Indicators, Assessed Annually

a. UIUC Senior Survey

These are answers given by graduating seniors on the series of items. We will be concerned with the full range of items available, with special attention to college and departmental breakdowns.

b. ICES Scores

Student Evaluation Forms are distributed in almost all undergraduate classes. We have special concern with the following indicators and examine them on an annual basis in the context of the normal faculty performance review process:

1. Overall Instructor Teaching Effectiveness (#1)
2. Overall Quality of the Course (#2)
3. Instructor Facilitation of Student Motivation (#325)
4. Comparative Student Learning (# 16 1)

5. Instructor Sensitivity to Student Needs (#350)
6. Agreement Between Course Objectives and Execution (#4)

c. VPAA Survey Quality Indicators.

These are the answers given by graduates who respond to the alumni surveys conducted by the Office of Planning and Budgeting. The data are reported to our unit as moving averages of two and one-year-out surveys.

1. The average scores for the overall quality of instruction.
2. The average scores for the quality of academic program advising and information.
3. The average scores for communication between faculty and students regarding student needs and concerns.
4. Percent of new graduates in the previous year holding full-time positions they consider closely related to their field of study.
5. Percent of new graduates who think that their degree prepared them well for their present position.

d. CIC and Other Comparisons.

As primary competitors for students and as peer institutions in quality, the Department regularly shares information with the CIC and uses several comparative measures as benchmarks. The Department also has access to information about political science programs around the country from surveys done by the American Political Science Association.

1. Patterns of enrollment in Political Science majors.
2. Patterns of enrollment in Political Science courses.
3. Patterns of application and enrollment in law schools.

e. Review of Course Syllabi

As part of his or her annual review of faculty, the Head will review the syllabi or other course plans.

Ad Hoc and Irregularly Collected Undergraduate Program Indicators

a. Self-Reported Student Satisfaction Measures.

Measures of student satisfaction with the program, program quality, and other factors are collected in a variety of ways. These give indications of how the students view the program.

1. Surveys, meetings and workshops conducted or requested by Pi Sigma Alpha (PSA) and Minorities in Political Science (MIPS) organizations.
2. Comments to the DUGS or Head from PSA and MIPS representatives, and other undergraduate students.
3. Undergraduate student participation in relevant committees (such as the recent Undergraduate Program Review committee).
4. Focus group responses on selected topics in a process commissioned by the Head.

b. Measures of Academic Performance

1. Studies comparing student achievement in advanced courses with reference to their performance in intermediate or introductory courses.
2. Studies on the production of senior theses.
3. Studies of student achievement after college.

SUPPORT NEEDS

The Department believes that it can collect and analyze the above information through existing channels and without additional personnel or support.