Political Science  
2004-2005 Assessment Report

Political science is committed to assessment of our undergraduate and graduate programs as an ongoing part of our educational activities. While the assessment programs that we have implemented are still young, the department has continued to develop several programs that we believe will permit us to augment our assessment of our educational endeavors. In this memo I explain these assessment programs in more detail.

Undergraduate assessment

At the undergraduate levels, our assessment programs are written into our disciplinary major. Each major is expected to complete a capstone experience, and we have several from which students choose. While this diversity does not permit a simple comparison of outcomes (i.e., some students write a thesis, some take a senior seminar, while others teach an undergraduate course), it does provide us with some interesting data on how students see their own work progressing and it does provide several groups of similarly situated seniors whose work can be analyzed for familiarity with the discipline. Since political science is never or only infrequently taught prior to the university, we assume little or no theoretical knowledge for beginning majors. The few students who have completed a thesis in our department often reveal remarkable facility with theoretical models and empirical work, but this is not surprising as this is an option that our best students seem to choose. Senior seminars provide a more directly comparative subset of students, and for the most part these students still reveal some difficulties with writing that has encouraged us to sponsor more writing intensive courses in political science. The table below summarizes our experiences with the capstone experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>401-Teaching</th>
<th>402-Legislative Interns</th>
<th>403-Community Interns</th>
<th>406-Senior Seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2004</strong></td>
<td>18 students</td>
<td>12 students</td>
<td>14 students</td>
<td>17 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All excelled</td>
<td>Grades from A+ to B+</td>
<td>Two students failed to complete. All others excelled.</td>
<td>Grades widely distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2004</strong></td>
<td>5 students</td>
<td>n/o</td>
<td>21 students</td>
<td>15 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All excelled</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grades from A+ to B+; one student failed to complete</td>
<td>B average among students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2005</strong></td>
<td>7 students</td>
<td>12 students</td>
<td>5 students</td>
<td>14 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All excelled</td>
<td>Most excelled; one C</td>
<td>Most excelled; one C+</td>
<td>A’s and B’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our new undergraduate curriculum, while only four years old, has also produced a cohort of students interested in the study of methods (all majors must take political science 390, our methods class) which provide direct comparison across the field of majors. We have instituted a mechanism where instructors of this course talk with each other and consider improvements to a “core” syllabus, in an effort to increase students’ facilities with the numerous models employed by political scientists.

Another development in our assessment is the creation of an on-line post-advising session where student progress and the quality of faculty advising is self-assessed. This new advising system will be in full operation by fall semester.

Our educational goals include facility with comparative models, appropriate writing skills (analytic and persuasive writing), and critical reading of political science texts. In the next few semesters we will begin to refine the knowledges that we are gaining in the capstone and methods courses in order to return to the earlier years of political science education and address deficiencies that we have recognized.

Graduate level assessment

Assessment at the graduate level was begun several years ago with an annual discussion among the faculty of each graduate student, her progress, special needs, and her academic strengths. Graduate committees are the appropriate central organs of support, assessment, and mentoring of advanced graduate students. Nonetheless, the department has learned that a general discussion of student progress elicits a great deal of information about our graduate program, its strengths and weaknesses, and the general issues facing graduate students, especially in their earlier years in the program. It also offers an opportunity to address specific issues confronting some students and their committees, multiplying both the pedagogical ideas that can aid student progress.

This procedure has motivated the graduate faculty to hold broad discussions concerning the graduate curriculum during the 2004-2005 academic year. These discussions culminated in an agreement among faculty and graduate students for several reforms that will augment our assessment capabilities. The most important among these include:

- a required self-assessment from each graduate student addressing her progress and perceived strengths and weaknesses.
- a smaller graduate student body that will permit greater mentoring opportunities. We have agreed to diminish the size of our program by approximately one third.
- mandatory attendance at a series of evening workshops focusing on professional development, including writing, publication, etc.
- mandatory course for Ph.D. students entitled “writing political science” to further prepare graduate students for professional scholarly commitments
- establishment of peer mentoring groups
We also base our assessment of our graduate program on the success of our placement. Our doctoral students primarily seek academic careers, but some choose to work in government agencies or for non-governmental organizations. In the past two years, we have granted 12 Ph.D.’s. Of those, three sought academic jobs or post-doctoral positions and received them. Four others are preparing to seek jobs this coming year, having finished too recently to be competitive in last year’s market. Three others have received jobs in the governmental or NGO sectors.

Our students in the past few years have earned academic positions at research and teaching institutions. We have placed students within the California State University system, the Washington State University system, Bowling Green (Ohio), Hobart and William Smith College, and Southern Florida State within the past few years. The political science market remains difficult for new graduates, especially since the public sector has retrenched and begun to rely more heavily upon temporary hires. Nonetheless, our students have done remarkably well.

One key to this success is our active mentoring of students in their first forays into scholarship. We involve our students in national and international conferences by proposing mixed panels of faculty and graduate students in areas of our interest. We also invest a great deal of energy helping our students prepare publishable papers. Our graduate student publication rate has been quite high. On average, students completing our doctoral program have published 2.5 papers in peer-reviewed journals, but some have published much more by the time they graduate.

Our masters graduates divide somewhat evenly into two groups: those seeking a doctoral or other professional degree, and those who have decided that a terminal masters degree best fits their immediate plans. Of those students who decide to continue with their degree, about one third who apply to our doctoral program are accepted. Many are not accepted, but do seek and find a compatible program elsewhere. Students ending their graduate education (if only temporarily) have found employment in government, high school teaching, private and non-governmental firms.