

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: MA in Political Science and Public Affairs

Department: Political Science

Degree or Certificate Level: Graduate

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences

Date (Month/Year): June 2020

Primary Assessment Contact: Ellen Carnaghan

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2019-2020

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2016

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

Outcome 3: Students will be able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates.

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

The department's assessment of the MA learning outcome above included 6 graduate seminars taught by POLS faculty in 2019-2020 and MA field exams that students take at the beginning of their final semester in the program. All courses assessed were offered in person for the first half of the semester and online for the second half. One course, POLS 5610, was offered in Madrid.

POLS 5730 Contemporary Political Ideologies
POLS 5550 Politics of Economic Development
POLS 5610 International Relations: Theory and Practice (Madrid campus)
POLS 5360 Urban Economic Development
POLS 5930 Race, Class, and Punishment
POLS 5690 Theories of World Politics

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

Department Assessment Coordinator Ellen Carnaghan organized the assessment process—devising the Qualtrics survey, reminding faculty throughout the year of the learning outcome being assessed, and generating the Qualtrics report. Instructors for selected graduate seminars responded to the questions listed below. Each course instructor decided how to measure whether or not a student had met the learning outcome expectations. Graduate Coordinator Wynne Moskop summarized faculty responses to each question and wrote the assessment report.

Instructors responded to these 11 questions on a Qualtrics survey:

Q2. How did your class contribute to this goal?

Q3. Which of these instruments did you use to assess student learning for this report? Check all that apply. (Options are: one or more essays; one or more test or exam questions; a final project/ describe; and other/describe.)

Q34. By the end of class, students in my class could design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies. (Options are: All students met or exceeded the objective; 75-99 percent of students met or exceeded the objective; 50-74 percent of students met or exceeded the objective Some, but less than 50 percent of students met the objective; No students met the objective.)

Q22. By the end of class, students in my class could contribute to ongoing scholarly debates. (Options are: All students met or exceeded the objective; 75-99 percent of students met or exceeded the objective; 50-74 percent of students met or exceeded the objective; Some, but less than 50 percent of students met the objective; No students met the objective.)

Q4. How well could students design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates? What could they do well in this regard? What could they do less well? Please address as many parts of the learning outcome as are relevant for your class.

Q21. Of the graduate students in your class, how did Political Science graduate students compare in terms of being able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies? (Options are: On average, Political Science students performed better than students from other departments; On average, students from all departments performed more or less the same; On average, Political Science students performed worse than students from other departments; All the graduate students in my class were Political Science students, as far as I know.)

Q23. Of the graduate students in your class, how did Political Science graduate students compare in terms of being able to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates. (Options are: On average, Political Science students performed better than students from other departments; On average, students from all departments performed more or less the same; On average, Political Science students performed worse than students from other departments; All the graduate students in my class were Political Science students, as far as I know.)

Q11. What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates?

Q12. Do you have suggestions for changing the MA curriculum or approaches in individual courses in order to make sure that students will be able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates?

Q38. Is there anything you want to add about your students' learning?

Q39. Do you have any comments to improve this reporting process?

In addition to the Qualtrics survey, the Department assessed MA field exam results for the two students who took the exam this year. The three faculty on each exam committee assessed the student's exam. The Graduate Coordinator summarized the results for this report.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

Findings based on the Qualtrics survey:

Q2. This year, we agreed to examine this learning outcome: Students will be able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate

methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates. You can determine whether or not students achieved this outcome according to the goals of your class. How did your class contribute to this goal?

POLS 5730. Students were required to design their own research projects related to ideologies and complete a seminar paper. Components of the projects were due in stages: general topic, title and abstract, literature review, rough draft, presentation to class, critique of another student's project, final draft.

POLS 5550. All students wrote a formal research paper where they designed and carried out an original research project. The assignment was originally designed as a 3-step process (research proposal, workshop and feedback, and final paper) but the workshop component was canceled due to time constraints related to the transition to distance learning. Students completed the research proposal, received feedback from me (but not from other students in the original workshop format), and submitted final papers of approximately 25 pages.

POLS 5610. The final for this class is a 4,000 words research paper on a topic of the student's own choosing. In addition, students are asked to submit a 2,000 words research proposal and present the project to class for 20 minutes. Both the research design and paper must include a literature review, that summarizes and maps out the key positions encountered in the literature on a specific topic and locates a gap, a research question and hypothesis and make use of the relevant Political Science research methodologies in the analysis of primary data. Overall, I am satisfied that students registered in this class were able to design original research projects, make full use of appropriate methodologies, and contribute to closing specific gaps within the existing academic literature.

POLS 5630. Students did 3 written assignments and 1 in-class presentation. The 3 written assignments consisted of 2 short policy memos between 8-10 pages each and the final project: Develop an economic development plan for a city. In this final paper, the idea was for them to put everything together that they learned during the course to design an effective economic development strategic plan for their city. In-class presentation of your economic development plan occurred at the end of the semester after they completed the final paper. Students were required to use Power Point to present their plan to the class.

POLS 5930. The main assignment in the course was to write a research paper. This included separate assignments detailing different steps of the research process: initial questions/topic; prospectus, outline and annotated bibliography; rough draft; peer review; final draft.

POLS 5690. I assigned a 10-page research paper for the two students I had in this category. They chose original topics after consultation with me, including one on the IMF. This helped students get exposed to some of the ongoing academic discussions on the topics that interested them.

Q3. Which of these instruments did you use to assess student learning for this report? Check all that apply.

- 3 reported one or more essays
- 1 reported one or more exam or test questions
- 2 reported a research design
- 6 reported a research paper
- 1 reported other
 - rough draft for instructor feedback, presentation to class, critique of another's student's research presentation

Q34. By the end of class, students in my class could design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies.

- 5 reported that all students met or exceeded the objective
- 1 reported that 75-99 percent of students met or exceeded the objective
- None reported lower levels of achievement

Q22. By the end of class, students in my class could contribute to ongoing scholarly debates.

- 4 reported that all students met or exceeded the objective
- 2 reported that 75-99 percent of students met or exceeded the objective
- None reported lower levels of achievement

Q4. How well could students design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates? What could they do well in this regard? What could they do less well? Please address as many parts of the learning outcome as are relevant for your class.

Overview of responses

- One instructor commented that, while students initially had difficulty figuring out what literature to review to establish their own contribution to scholarly debates, most gradually learned to do that well.
- Another instructor commented that 4 of the 5 graduate students engaged well with scholarly debates. One student's research was purely descriptive, without much attention to either methodology or scholarly debates.
- One instructor reported that all students executed literature reviews and used methodologies well, but their ability to integrate research design, data analysis, and final reporting needs improvement.
- In a course that required students to use particular tools to design an economic development plan for their city, the instructor reported that students could identify the appropriate tools, but their discussion of the impact of those tools was less developed.
- One instructor commented that the single graduate student in the course did an excellent job using appropriate methodologies and that she engaged scholarly debates to a limited extent, which was appropriate for that student's project.
- One instructor reported that students struggled to design original research projects.

Detailed comments from 6 instructors are below.

- Like students in previous graduate seminars, 3 of the 4 graduate students initially had some difficulty figuring out what literature to review to establish the significance of their particular contribution. Two of those students gradually figured that out and executed literature reviews that set up their projects well. One student, an ABM undergraduate had no difficulty whatsoever. The fourth student, who stayed behind all semester, never quite met expectations on this particular component of the research design.
- Of the 5 students in the course, 4 clearly achieved this outcome. The other student did a very good job of summarizing and critiquing existing scholarly literature and debates, but his own research was purely descriptive without much attention to methodology or how detailed descriptions might contribute to scholarly debates.
- The 5000-level students met and exceeded expectations on this learning outcome. Particularly well executed were the literature reviews and maps of the literature. The use of methodologies, such as discourse analysis of key political speeches, legal and policy texts, interviews, was also of a high standard. What could improve is the integration between the research design, primary analysis of data and the final reporting. A higher level of integration between the different parts and a level of finesse could be something to aim for and continue to develop.
- The objectives of the course were to: 1) provide an introduction to the key concepts, ideas, strategies and (often conflicting and contradictory) goals of urban economic development; 2) give students an

understanding of the impacts that global, national, regional, and state economic forces and policies have on cities; 3) allow students to critically reflect on the goals, objectives, and outcomes of local economic development efforts, particularly in light of questions like who benefits, who loses, and how do such efforts increase or decrease social inequality? 4) provide the tools to examine the historical, economic, political, and social environments in which economic development policymaking occurs; 5) provide an opportunity to analyze the range of strategies, programs, and tools that are used to improve the economic prospects of neighborhoods, cities, and regions; and 6) give students an understanding the complex politics of urban economic development. Objectives 1, 4 & 5 are directly related to the above question. Students were asked to design an economic development plan for their city using the tools (LO #4) discussed in class. The plan was analyzed for its political feasibility (substitute for contribution to scholarly debates). The students were able to correctly identify the appropriate tools (example: tax breaks) and how it should be used in their city's context. Less well-developed was their discussion of possible impacts, both positive and negative, of the implementation of the tool. Also under-developed was the discussion of the political feasibility of the plan. Students didn't address the issue of winners and losers in their presentations.

- I had only one student taking the 5000 course. She did an excellent job in conducting original research using appropriate methodologies. Her question was narrow enough in scope to achieve a real original contribution and she was able to secure the appropriate primary source material to answer her question. While she used literature from class and additional research to frame the project and thus somewhat engaged with existing scholarship, perhaps the less developed part of the project was this portion of the learning objective. She used existing literature to help support her project but did not spend a lot of time delving into a "debate" here. While this was entirely appropriate for the project she was conducting it did not allow her paper to reflect on her proficiency in this particular part of the learning objective.
- They did well in following instructions in general about how to proceed with course expectations. They struggled to design original research projects. Of the two students, one of them came up with a research question already with an answer for it, so they had little incentive to conduct new research. I talked to them and fixed the problem. The other student was not particularly interested in this course, struggling to come up with a topic that they wanted to write about. This student consulted me several times to settle on one, but they decided to change it later, thus wasting some time that they could have used to write a stronger paper.

Q21. Of the graduate students in your class, how did Political Science graduate students compare in terms of being able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies?

- 3 reported on average, graduate students from all departments performed more or less the same
- 2 reported all the graduate students in my class were Political Science students, as far as I know
- 1 did not respond

Q23. Of the graduate students in your class, how did Political Science graduate students compare in terms of being able to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates. (Options are: On average, Political Science students performed better than students from other departments; On average, students from all departments performed more or less the same; On average, Political Science students performed worse than students from other departments; All the graduate students in my class were Political Science students, as far as I know.)

- 3 reported on average, students from all departments performed more or less the same
- 2 reported all the graduate students in my class were Political Science students, as far as I know
- 1 did not respond

Q11. What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates?

- **instructor feedback on initial literature review, peer and instructor feedback on oral presentation, class discussion of persuasiveness of each student's project.**
- **Starting the research design process early in the semester** seemed effective in encouraging students to start thinking about these issues early enough that they could make mistakes, receive feedback, and think through ways to improve their work before it was due at the end of the semester. **Starting with short, low-cost assignments (1 page research design)** allows students to take risks that, I think, eventually improve outcomes.
- **Breaking the project down into manageable steps and stages:** from locating the puzzle/problem, defining a research question, variables and hypothesis to identifying the relevant methods and collecting primary data. **Having the chance to receive formative feedback on the research design and then presentation stages,** before the submission of final the paper, is something students find useful. The process allows for several key opportunities to improve and develop.
- **The final paper built on the first 2 assignments so that the students received extensive feedback on their final paper before they submitted the final product.** For their **presentation, they gave a dry-run earlier in the semester and received feedback then which they incorporated into the final presentation.** Their key was to provide early and frequent feedback to the students.
- **Breaking up the research project into a number of steps with a great deal of feedback.** In addition to assignments **doing weekly check ins on the progress** to reinforce the importance of these smaller steps. **Meeting and discussing the project face to face.** A lot of **written feedback** on the research paper assignments as well as weekly response papers.
- **Assigning scholarly material that was relevant to the research and being sure to emphasize what these authors were doing and what components to consider in terms of a model** of the scholarship the students were taking on.
- **Encouragement that they read newspapers to find topics they find interesting for research papers. Assigning materials that are more recently published.**

Q12 - Do you have suggestions for changing the MA curriculum or approaches in individual courses in order to make sure that students will be able to design original research and seminar projects that investigate political processes with appropriate methodologies and contribute to ongoing scholarly debates?

- In my experience the **most effective practice for getting students to process the logic of literature review for a research project is conversation that presses them to talk about why they want to do X, who else might be interested, why.** Actually, conversation along these lines is still the thing that's most helpful to me when I'm developing a new project.
- It is essential to **make sure there is a high level of coherence between the advanced methods class and other classes that require students to design original research** and conduct their own collection and analysis of primary data.
- **Reinforcement in all the courses of the idea of feedback throughout the semester** rather than wait until the end.
- Potentially **encouraging students to continue seminar papers after the course in the form of independent study to continue the research over a longer period of time.** This would also allow them to get more advanced in research skills and independence in their research.
- For this purpose, it may be a good idea to **require students to take research methods courses in the very first semester of their MA program.**

Q38 - Is there anything you want to add about your students' learning?

- I think I could say more if my course evaluations were available.
- Despite the feedback, students still struggled with some areas (example: who benefits and who loses from economic development decisions). There was still a tendency to adopt a surface perspective when it came to this last point. In other words, students would not go deeper than to indicate that a tax break would benefit all

developers equally.

Q39 - Do you have any comments to improve this reporting process?

I think that I might be able to provide better answers if I had access to my course evals for this semester.

Findings based on MA field exams:

Two students took the MA field exam in February 2020—one political theory student and one American political development student. Both exams required the candidates to engage in scholarly debates. One student demonstrated proficiency in this and other areas and passed the exam easily. The other student did not meet expectations for engaging in scholarly debates on first writing and passed the exam only after rewriting part of it.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

- All graduate courses assessed this year required students to produce research projects or papers.
- Four of the six instructors reported that all POLS graduate students in their course met or exceeded expectation for both components of the learning outcome (designing research projects with appropriate methodologies and contributing to scholarly debates). Two instructors reported that 75-99 percent met expectations.
- As effective tactics, instructors continued to stress requiring research projects to be started early and developed in stages. Feedback should be provided as the project develops.
- Additional effective tactics reported were
 - Assigning scholarly material relevant to the research, emphasizing what the authors are doing, and what components of their work might serve as a model for students.
 - Encouraging students to read newspapers to find topics they find interesting for research papers and assigning materials that are more recently published
 - Starting with short, low-cost assignments
- Instructors had no recommendations for changing the curriculum. The suggested these approaches for improving courses and the overall coherence of the MA curriculum.
 - Engage students in the logic of research design; engage them in conversation about why they want to do X, who else might be interested, and why
 - Ensure a high level of coherence between the advanced methods class and other classes that require students to design original research
 - Reinforcement in all the courses of the idea of feedback throughout the semester
 - Perhaps encourage students' skill and independence by encouraging them to continue seminar papers after the course through independent study
 - Consider requiring students to take research methods courses in the very first semester of their MA program

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

Current findings will be shared and discussed in fall 2020:

- Faculty discuss results of each year's assessment at the fall retreat and consider how pedagogical

techniques, course curricula, or the overall curriculum may be adjusted to respond to problems or to spread good results throughout the department.

- The graduate coordinator shares learning outcomes with MA students every fall and invites their comments. This normally is done in the mandatory orientation for MA students at the beginning of every fall semester.

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

<p>Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course content • Teaching techniques • Improvements in technology • Prerequisites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course sequence • New courses • Deletion of courses • Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings
<p>Changes to the Assessment Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student learning outcomes • Artifacts of student learning • Evaluation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics) • Data collection methods • Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

Based on results summarized above and results of earlier assessments, the fall 2020 retreat will include discussion and action on a number of items related to curriculum and pedagogy that merit continuing attention:

- Different ways to provide feedback to students on research design, literature review, methodological choices, and public presentations
- Tactics for helping students to design and execute research projects
- Ways to enhance correspondence between the advanced research methods course and other courses, including whether to require students to take methods during their first semester
- Feedback on students' oral presentations; planning event with Communication Department faculty who can provide expertise

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

Faculty will discuss any changes to be made as a result of the 2019-2020 Assessment at the Department's fall 2020 retreat. See below for changes made earlier as a result of the Department's annual assessment.

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

Changes made as a result of earlier assessment include:

1. Starting in the 2016-2017 academic year, the Department moved to a Qualtrics survey for collecting assessment data from faculty. **The Assessment Coordinator refines the survey each year to respond to any ambiguity in results from the previous year.** Faculty continue to agree that this survey is superior to the earlier methods of collecting assessment reports from narrative responses to questions. The Qualtrics survey keeps faculty responses focused on the learning outcome being assessed and improves our confidence in assessment results.

2. Based on the June 2017 report, faculty agreed that graduate level courses should require a literature review, a research design or proposal, or a research paper (excluding courses that may not have a specific research component). **In 2019-2020, all graduate courses assessed required research papers or projects.**
3. Based on the June 2018 assessment, faculty concluded that students need more practice and feedback on oral presentations. We agreed to invite in public speaking professionals or SLU FPA faculty specializing in oral presentations.
 - **The Department started discussion with faculty in the Department of Communication. We hope to organize an event in the coming academic year.**
 - **Two faculty shared rubrics they use to evaluate oral presentations.**
 - **The Graduate Coordinator discussed the need for more feedback on students' oral presentations with MA students; the students agreed that would be helpful.**
4. Based on assessment of 2019 MA field exams in the international affairs concentration, faculty in that concentration suggested that IA students needed more exposure to both comparative politics and international relations subfields. **International Affairs faculty proposed changes to concentration requirements to reduce the number of unrestricted electives and structure the requirements so that students will be exposed to both concentration subfields. Those changes were approved by the Department, submitted to the CAS Curriculum Committee, approved by the Faculty Council and GAAC, and implemented in 2019-2020.**

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

1. The Assessment Coordinator assesses the Qualtrics survey according to whether it yields clear or ambiguous results and whether or not it targets faculty concerns articulated in the assessment report.
2. The Qualtrics survey always asks instructors what tools they use for assessment so that we can keep track of the use of research projects, as well as other tools.
3. We are still planning to invite a presentation from Communication Faculty to help us develop criteria and provide feedback for students' oral presentations.
4. The effectiveness of changing the MA International Affairs requirements will be assessed when the next students take the International Affairs field exam.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

The only curricular change—in the International Affairs concentration—is new. It will be assessed after a cohort of students completes the new requirements and takes the field exam.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

Improving students' mastery of research projects—the logic of research design, literature review, devising appropriate methods and collecting persuasive evidence—is a shared goal of department faculty. The main way we pursue this goal is by sharing strategies and taking stock of which strategies worked particularly well. We do this every year.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.