

Program Assessment Report 2017-2018

Program Name: Political Science

Program Learning Outcome: 3).To communicate clearly, accurately, and persuasively about political issues and ideas.

1. Identify the artifact(s) (i.e. student work or outputs) that you used to assess the PLO. [Projects, papers, presentations, portfolios, exam questions, specific assignments, capstone work]

Artifacts: Presentations

Other artifact(s)

Each student in Political Science Research (PS 210) was required to prepare an electronic poster to share the results of their semester-long research project. The students presented the results of their research during the final exam period but our assessment focused solely upon the students' ability to convey their research through an electronic poster.

2. Identify the instruments (e.g. rubrics, surveys, spreadsheets, statistical software) used to assess the artifact(s) (i.e. the way in which student output are analyzed).

Instruments: Rubrics

Other instruments Used

Each student's poster was evaluated using a rubric that assessed the following criteria: Presentation of Research; Visual Presentation; Documentation of Sources, Quality of Sources; and Spelling & Grammar. Each criteria was assessed at the level of: Expert; Proficient; Apprentice; and Novice. The results were then analyzed in an Excel spreadsheet.

3. Describe program collaboration to plan, implement and use the results of assessment.

Most Political Science faculty believe that it is just as important for us to help students become producers of knowledge as it is for them to simply consume knowledge. We also believe that simply "knowing" the material is not enough. We want our students and graduates to effectively share their knowledge and research with diverse audiences.

As a result, the Department assessed poster presentations from Political Science Research (PS 210). Political Science Research is a required course for majors that is usually taken during one's sophomore or junior year. Since we do not have a senior-level seminar or capstone project requirement, the Department thought that assessing an artifact from this required sophomore-junior-level course would be an appropriate target to assess during the 2017-2018 academic year. Posters are also one of the many ways that Political Scientists share their research with others in the profession.

Explain the results of the assessment activities.

Thirteen out of fourteen completed the assignment (seven Political Science first majors and one second major; three International Studies majors; and one each from Marketing and History.

In terms of Presentation of Research, students performed satisfactorily: 3 scored Expert, 6 Proficient, 3 Apprentice, and 1 Novice.

In terms of Visual Presentation, students performed adequately: 1 scored Expert, 6 Proficient, 4 Apprentice, and 2 Novice.

In terms of Documentation of Sources and Quality of Sources, students performed poorly: 1 scored Expert, 2 Proficient, 10 Apprentice, and 0 Novice.

In terms of Spelling & Grammar, students performed well: 1 scored Expert, 9 Proficient, 3 Apprentice, and 0 Novice.

4. Where applicable, outline the steps you will take to make improvements to the program based on the results of assessment activities identified in #3.

In recent years, the Department has struggled to convince students of the importance of citing other authors' works in their own. While students did an adequate job of citing sources in the papers that they wrote for the assignment, they failed to carry over those citations from the paper to the poster. The PS 210 instructor will make more explicit the need to not only cite material in papers, but to cite appropriate material in posters (and PowerPoints) during the next iteration. The Scranton and the World (PS 110) instructor will likewise make such expectations a more prominent part of the directions for the poster presentation that students complete in that class. Finally, in September, the Department will discuss the adoption of assignments in other classes, specifically our introductory American Politics classes, and strategies to reinforce the importance of citing others' work.

In terms of Presentation of Research and Visual Presentation, the students performed well enough. Only one student had previously taken Scranton and the World (PS 110), which also included the creation of an electronic poster. At this point, we would like to move more students from the Apprentice cell into the Proficient cell so that if and when they complete posters for senior-level classes or at academic conferences, they will be better prepared to score in the Expert category. The one student who scored Expert in each category presented her research this semester at an off-campus political science conference and at the campus-wide Celebration of Student Scholars event.

For the last few years, political science graduates have completed a senior exit survey that asked how well their political science courses addressed various skills and issues, including oral communication skills. Surprisingly, students regularly gave us relatively poor marks in this area. On a scale of one to five (with five being the highest), the average score for how well we have addressed oral communication has been 4.14 (2012), 3.1 (2014), 3.73 (2015), and 3.6 (2016). The scores tended to be lower than all other skills / issues.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Critical Thinking	4.29		4.2		4.33	3.5	4.75
Writing Skills	4.43		4		3.78	3	4.5

Oral Communication Skills	4.14	-	3.1	3.73	3.6	3.75	4.125
Social Justice Issues	3.86		3.33		3.8	3.75	4
Diversity	4.57		3.6		3.8	2.5	4.375

As a result, the Department of Political Science agreed to create an introductory-level FYOC and FYDT course that would be geared towards first year political science and social science majors. Scranton and the World (PS 140, now PS 110) with FYOC and FYDT designations is now a recommended course for political science majors. The course is designed to be taken during the second semester of a student's first year at the University. Last year's graduating class (2017) gave an average score of 3.75 to assess how well the department addressed oral communication skills. The average for that skill was tied for highest among all skills as assessed by the graduating class. In 2018, oral communication skills once again received an improved score – an average of 4.125.

As the University moved forward with EP II, the department worked to identify those upper-division political science courses where we it could EPO (and EPD) into its curriculum. PS 331 European Union was an obvious fit for EPO, as the course included an intercollegiate competition in Washington, DC, that required a great deal of oral presentations and debate. Gretchen Van Dyke worked with Teresa Grettano in fall 2017 to revise the course so that it met EPO expectations. Even though the University has decided not to go through with EP II, we feel that was are better addressing oral communication for our students.

We hope that the integration of a first year course and the subsequent identification of upper division oral communication-oriented courses will maintain student assessment of oral communication above 4.