

## Political Science Biennial Program Assessment Report November 2015 Submission

### SECTION ONE: PROGRAM STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The 2012-2013 review noted that our program needed to clarify program learning outcomes. We have SIX overarching *learning goals*:

- 1) Understand and apply theory frameworks
  - Political Science students should...
    - a. Recognize the normative and ethical components of politics
    - b. Understand the theoretical foundations of politics in the different subfields
    - c. Recognize the value of theory for making sense of the past and present
    - d. Be able to apply theoretical arguments or concepts in the service of explanation or prediction
- 2) Understand and apply history as a lens of inquiry
  - Political Science students should...
    - a. Understand that historical patterns and their disruption are a critical part of the discipline
    - b. Be able to use history as a framework for understanding contemporary politics
- 3) Understand and explain contemporary politics
  - Political Science students should...
    - a. Demonstrate an understanding of current political debates and themes in the different subfields
    - b. Be able to draw connections between theory and history in the service of answering “big questions” facing contemporary polities
- 4) Engage locally and globally
  - Political Science students should...
    - a. Understand public policy and decision making processes
    - b. Be able to evaluate the quality of global and democratic citizenship
    - c. Apply theory and strategies concerning political action (civic engagement, social movements, protest, voting, etc.)
    - d. Demonstrate capacity to lead and inform for the public good
- 5) Analyze and explain political behavior, patterns and events
  - Political Science students should...
    - a. Be able to interpret and synthesize different forms of information (raw data, reports, texts, academic research, etc.)
    - b. Demonstrate awareness of the distinction between opinion and matters prone to evidentiary analysis and understand the value of evidence in constructing valid arguments
    - c. Use different forms of evidence in constructing their own arguments
    - d. Utilize statistical concepts and the elements of research design in their own work
    - e. Be able to identify and apply a research methodology appropriate to a research question

## 6) Communicate effectively

- Political Science students should...
  - a. Clearly and accurately present ideas and research effectively in a variety of formats (written, oral, multi-media, etc.)
  - b. Accurately and fairly represent the analyses, arguments, and ideas of others
  - c. Recognize and use proper citation methods in academic work
  - d. Be able to distinguish and employ the structure, format and syntax conventions of the different subfields in written work
  - e. Express information in a way that is accessible to different audiences (peers, professional, academic, general public, etc.)

These learning outcomes are assessed using our Department of Political Science Core Competencies Rubric (attached as Appendix 1). The rubric is designed to help us identify learning progression across the six core goals. By the end of our 100-200 level courses we expect students to be in the “basic performer” category; and by graduation in the Solid to Advanced performer category.

**SECTION TWO: ASSESSMENT METHODS/TOOLS APPROPRIATE FOR LEARNING OUTCOME**

What are the various methods used in assessing program outcomes? Align the assessment methods with the appropriate learning outcome. Please use the table at the end of these guidelines for your alignment planning. Identify the milestone assessment points throughout the program, including entrance into the program, midpoint, internship or field experiences, capstone or end of program, including surveys after graduation. Multiple methods, including both direct and indirect measurements, of assessments are recommended. Possible sources of assessment include:

A. Direct Assessment: Embedded assessments at the course level:

- **Early-program reflections on learning / learning goals.** All political science faculty members have been encouraged to ask students to provide a reflection on one or more political science student learning outcomes that is course specific. Compliance among faculty has not been strong in the early-program courses. In those courses the focus for faculty has been on requiring and assessing student learning reflections of USP-specific learning goals. That data goes to USP and has not been collected at the departmental level. Course embedded assignments and paired student reflections in introductory courses provide a way to gauge student learning of specific goals; however, these goals vary by course and subfield; and students are mostly non-majors. The department is working through how to piggy-back on the USP student learning assessment process for these early-program courses (which are either Quest II or Explore courses) to collect department data without over burdening the instructors. The department does not use grades as an assessment measure of student learning.
- **Mid-program milestone assessment of research skills.** Our Political Methodology class (84-245) is designed to be taken mid-major by our students, after the 100-level classes but before most 300-level classes. The course focuses on learning and applying quantitative research methods and the research process from asking a good question to developing and testing hypotheses. As part of this course we require students to read the book *How to Write a Research Paper in Political Science* by Lisa A. Baglione and assign a major research paper using quantitative analysis. The department assesses student performance both individually

and collectively to discern student strengths and weaknesses in quantitative analysis and analytical ability.

- ***End of program milestone assessment of research and writing skills.*** In the senior capstone course (84-401) students produce a major piece of research. This assignment has varied, and has included the extension and revision of a previous research paper, writing a fully new research paper, and the production of formal research prospectus. The assignment is designed to demonstrate student facility in qualitative and/or quantitative research methods and analytical writing. Feedback given to the student focuses on demonstrated proficiency in qualitative and/or quantitative research methods and communication skills. Student orally present and/or defend their research to both faculty and peers. The department assesses student performance both individually and collectively (as part of the student's e-Portfolio, see below) to discern program strengths and weaknesses.

B. *Direct Assessment: Program level assessments:*

- ***Pre- and Post Tests*** are used to demonstrate how much students have learned and retained over a semester in 100-level “gateway” classes (both Quest and Explore versions of American Government and Politics, Introduction to Comparative Politics, International Relations and Essentials of Civic Engagement). Each of these tests consist of 20 multiple choice questions administered very early in the course and then again very late in the course. The comparison of pre- and post-test scores gauge student learning in these courses for all students (regardless of whether students are majors). In the previous review, it was not clear how the pre-post tests are used in program assessment. To clarify, the pre-post tests data indicate only that students are achieving learning growth in each subfield at a point in time. This is assessment of introductory teaching of course subfield concepts – we are looking for positive change from the beginning to the end of the semester in every course in every subfield. We use this data to revise as needed, delivery or emphasis of particular concepts and to assess whether the test questions themselves are still appropriate as we collectively change texts to keep abreast of changes in the discipline.

In this cycle we can see from the results that changes made to the exams in the previous year to better tailor them to key concepts in the field (and thus achieve greater consistency across sections) were successful in providing more meaningful results. We are more confident in the data than previously. The pre-post tests provide a rough measure that our introductory courses are achieving the kind of subfield foundational learning we expect as a department.

- ***Portfolios of student work*** demonstrate student learning over time and provide students with an opportunity to reflect deeply on their growth across their career in the major. Students and faculty use the competencies rubric to reflect on the learning that takes place across the whole of student's political science career. In our major's senior capstone course (84-401) students produce and submit a formal ePortfolio (using the D2L eP tool) which contains a variety of their work directly relevant to assessing each of the learning goals. Students provide a series of reflective statements that detail how their work aligns with our learning outcomes and program goals. Special emphasis is given to civic engagement (SLO 4) in the portfolio by asking students to reflect specifically on an experience (such as study abroad, a

group project, internship, etc.). Students also provide a substantial self-reflection statement about their achievement of department learning competencies as they prepare to leave the University. In addition to the reflective statements, the student produces a personal statement of the kind that would be included in a graduate or law school application and a professional résumé. Students receive faculty and peer feedback on each of these as well as their reflection statements as they prepare their final copy of the portfolio. Portfolios are evaluated with a revised *common rubric* designed for assessment purposes (see Appendix 2). Summary data from the portfolio evaluations (using the Department of Political Science Core Competencies Rubric), the research paper/project (see part A), and national test scores (see below) are generated for each student and provide a basis for departmental discussion of student learning and curricular revisions.

- ***Demonstrations / Performances*** allow students the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a holistic assessment format. The culmination of our senior capstone course has traditionally been an evening (or two) of research presentations, with each student in the capstone course (84-401) summarizing their final research in front of the entire Political Science faculty (and often family members, friends, and fellow majors). The senior capstone course has most recently (Spring 2015) switched to a student defense of their research before a panel of three faculty members, a format that provides greater and earlier interaction between the student and the faculty on their final research project. Fall 2015 has continued the practice of a defense panel. The defense provides a way for faculty to better assess student understanding and application of core concepts and theories as a whole (beyond the project) and a clear indication of students' analytical abilities (SLOs 1, 2, 3 and 5). The presentation /defense requirement is designed to offer a culminating experience gauging facility in oral communication and analytical ability (SLO 6). As with the senior research paper, the department assesses student performance both individually and collectively to discern program strengths and weaknesses.
- ***National exam*** aligned with the program's outcomes in areas of discipline specific knowledge and analytical skills. Senior capstone students (84-401) are required to take the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Major Field Test (MFT) in Political Science. These scores are compiled, archived, and used as a diagnostic tool to assess particular learning goals with respect to content, analytical thinking, and methods skills across subfields in the discipline. The MFT in Political Science was first administered in Fall 2009 and has been used every semester since.

C. Indirect Assessment Survey: Alumni surveys, focus groups, employers' surveys

- **Surveys:** The Political Science Department employs surveys of (a) **graduating seniors** and (b) **alumni** to gauge program performance. These surveys are both qualitative and quantitative. The instruments were redesigned for greater ease of distribution (through Qualtrics) and provide insight about the Department's ability to facilitate student achievement of our learning goals. The survey instruments are directly linked to specific learning outcomes and skills achievement as detailed in Section One; as a result, the surveys provide useful data about program strengths and weaknesses as well as concerns of graduates. Specific questions are geared to what people in and entering the workforce

consider to have worked best and been most useful, as well as comments about strengths and weaknesses. Political Science students go into a wide variety of fields; we have not utilized employer surveys for this reason.

### SECTION THREE: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

A. Describe the processes or methods of analysis you will use to understand assessment results in relation to program learning outcomes. For example, an annual department meeting planned to share and discuss the results is recommended. Instructors present evidence of student learning from select embedded assessments from courses. Program faculty may analyze learning outcome results on a cyclical basis by identifying a certain number of outcomes per cycle. The department decides on future actions that will promote student learning and/or change the assessment process. Programs may consult with O.I.R. for assistance, if needed. Guide questions for the analysis include:

- ***How will data from the assessments be collected, stored, and reported to program faculty members?*** Our annual departmental retreat serves as the primary means for disseminating assessment information, discussing program assessment, and formulating plans to tackle issues that arise from a review of our assessment tools.
  - ***Early-program reflections on learning / learning goals.*** During our summer retreat discussion about student learning, faculty draw on course embedded assessments and reflections to inform their views and comments on student learning in particular areas. This evidence is anecdotal, however. As noted above, this data has proven difficult to collect and remains unanalyzed in a systematic way as a result.
  - ***Pre- and Post Tests*** are given in the 100-level “gateway” classes. The results are compiled by *subfield* annually and presented to faculty at the department retreat. A comparison of pre- and post-tests scores between years helps us gauge student learning in the subfields and informs discussions among faculty in each subfield about teaching and learning innovations, textbook adoption, and course learning goals appropriate to the subfield.
  - ***Mid-program milestone assessment of research skills.*** During our summer retreat the faculty members who teach our methods course report their impressions about student learning with respect to learning goal 5. While this evidence is anecdotal, their goals concerning data methods and analysis are closely shared and they are able to paint a fairly clear picture of what is working and what is not working for the program. Students are encouraged to include their 84-245 quantitative papers in their capstone ePortfolios for reflection, but there is no formal mechanism of collection at the midway point.
  - ***End of program milestone assessment of research and writing skills.*** The research paper is a major part of the capstone course. It is evaluated by the instructor of record both for the student’s grade as well as for program assessment. A common rubric is used such that each capstone instructor evaluates individual and cohort student learning achievement. Summary data on student achievement of the learning outcomes from each capstone course is compiled annually (see Appendix 2).
  - ***Portfolios of student work - holistic assessment of written work and student reflections.*** The ePortfolios themselves are produced as ePresentations and collected and stored on a permanent D2L departmental site. All faculty members are

“observers” of this course and can view the portfolios and the rubrics at all times. The ePresentations are evaluated by the instructor of record for the capstone course using a common rubric to produce comparative annual assessment data, which is reviewed and discussed at the department retreat (see Appendix 2).

- ***Demonstrations / Performances - holistic assessment of oral presentations and defense of major work.*** Similar to the ePresentations, oral presentations during the capstone course are evaluated by the instructor of record for the capstone course using a common rubric to produce comparative annual assessment data, which is reviewed and discussed at the department retreat (see Appendix 2).
- ***National exam.*** Major Field Test (MFT) results for our department are archived by ETS and accessible to all of us, along with comparisons of national averages. The chair compiles comparative data and shares this data with the faculty at the department retreat. The data inform our collective conversation about achievement of departmental learning goals and possible changes to programming or requirements.
- ***Surveys:*** Senior surveys are designed by faculty and administered by ADA Ms. Hammond, with results held by her, and disseminated at the departmental retreat.

- ***What are the program’s strengths as indicated by the assessment data?***

*Overall the program is strong:* The assessment data, both the MFT, and crucially the overall assessment of student learning provided by a review of randomly selected portfolios during this period, reveals that our students are, on average, solid performers across ALL of our core competencies. The median student is a solid performer in every category except civic engagement, where we see a more bi-modal distribution, with some students demonstrating advanced performance on the learning goal 4.d (capacity to lead) and some at the basic performer level on this goal. Likewise, with learning goal 5.d (statistical concepts and application in research) students are generally solid to basic performers. In sum, it is a significant strength that students are performing at or above expectations on nearly every learning outcome.

The holistic portfolio assessment and the MFT scores together suggest that the program enables our very good students to stretch their ability and skills and to excel academically. Our best students score well above 90<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally on the MFT in Political Science (several in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally). These students go on to top graduate schools ( Ph.D., M.A. and J.D.). They have taken advantage of working closely with our faculty on research and engaging in high impact practices offered by department faculty, such as research assistantships, faculty student collaborative research, McNair scholar faculty mentoring, study abroad, and leadership opportunities afforded by group projects and intensive classroom simulations. Anecdotally, in 2015 five Political Science majors received the Chancellors Award; and in 2014 three students received the Chancellors Award.

*Our faculty is a major strength:* Our senior survey data indicate that faculty members are a significant asset to our programs. Students gave the department high marks based on their experiences with faculty members, noting for example: the high quality of the teaching faculty, their expertise, their openness to differing opinions, their personal encouragement of education and life goals, the quality of faculty advising, faculty-student interaction in the classroom, and faculty members’ availability, attitudes, and responsiveness. Survey comments include:

- “The greatest strength, hands down, is the faculty”
- “The faculty is very approachable and extremely helpful!”

- “Strength: quality of the professors”
- “Professors are by far the greatest strength”
- “The department’s greatest strengths are the synergy and cohesion among department members and their availability help and advise students”
- “Greatest Strengths ... absolutely making students feel welcome and like they matter. Also the tremendous enthusiasm and expertise the professors show in the classes they teach”

This is echoed in students’ reflections in their portfolios and in the alumni survey.

*Writing and oral communication:* While faculty always see room for improvement, student surveys indicate that departmental teaching related to writing, presentation and research have “very much” improved these particular skills. This is echoed by the Alumni Survey results.

- ***What are areas of concern that may require more monitoring in the future?***

Although, students are performing to expectations (and above) on every learning goal, we are constantly working on improving our curriculum and instruction. There are several areas of concern that we seek to address over the course of the next few years.

Student work in the methods course (PS245), the holistic portfolio assessment and the MFT scores together suggest two areas of concern: *Methods* training and application and *theoretical* understanding and application. Students consistently score lower on the MFT in the categories of methodology and political thought, especially compared to the critical and analytical thinking category which is ten more or percentage points higher.

*Methods:* Students self-report that they struggle with methods and the application of concepts in their own work. This matches their performance and Alumni survey data. Portfolio review reveals basic to solid performance particularly with respect to SLOs 5.d and 5.e (utilize statistical concepts and the elements of research design in their own work; and identify and apply a research methodology appropriate to a research question). One year ago the department made a long term commitment to having certain faculty members teach the senior seminar and other particular faculty teach the methods course. In the long term this should provide greater consistency in expectations for student learning in the methods course.

*Theory:* The assessment data with respect to student learning goals concerning theoretical frameworks and political theory (SLO 1) is mixed. While the MFT indicates lower performance, student written work is stronger. Portfolio reviews reveal that students are solid to basic performers in this area. None were underperforming. Alumni survey data demonstrate some lack of confidence in this area. The holistic data suggest that students recognize the value of theory, understand the theoretical foundations of politics in the different subfields and that they are applying theoretical arguments or concepts to questions, problems or issues. As a result of discussions about the assessment data we have concluded that the gap between the MFT and the portfolio assessment data may be due to how we communicate to students what we mean by “theory” – the terminology varies by subfield. We have resolved to work in the next cycle on having collective conversations about how we define and use theory in our subfields and courses, and on developing a common vocabulary concerning theoretical frameworks with the goal to make explicit for students the connections between contemporary theories and their roots in political thought. Also up for consideration is whether we would offer (and require) an introductory course for the political theory subfield.

*Basic and underperforming students:* As noted above, good students will do well anywhere, but our good students do exceptionally well and we have created a challenging and engaging environment with many high impact practices available to students. However, we feel that the middle range student – the B- / C+ student could be better served. These students are pulled along by their more successful peers in course embedded HIPs (such as simulations, mock trial, debates, etc.), and some engage in transformative experiences such as study abroad. For the most part, however, they struggle in individual work, they are less likely to engage in, or be asked to help with, independent research or collaborate with faculty. They are mediocre. We don't have data to support it, but the general feeling among faculty is that we lose some of these low to middle performing students along the way. We resolved in our summer meeting to “study the issue” further with the goal of identifying what we can do to provide a more welcoming and supportive environment for our middling students and develop methods in and out of the classroom to address the learning needs of our eager, but less well prepared, underperforming students.

*Diversity of students in the major:* Like many programs on campus, we do not have a very diverse student body in the major and minors. We see this as an area for concern, particularly with respect to our departmental (and the University's) civic education and engagement learning goals. We do not have data on diversity among our majors. This is a “watch” area for us and we are gathering data from institutional research to be able to better understand where our numbers are compared to the overall student body.

*Student / civic engagement:* Overall, we see solid to basic performance in this area; however, with respect to SLO 4.d (demonstrate capacity to lead and inform for the public good) students' performance is mixed with nearly equal proportions of advanced, solid and basic performers on this goal. Again, for students who are motivated and engaged to start with, the department supports wonderful internship and research experiences. A minority of students do an internship, however. The senior survey results also indicated there were not enough opportunities for internships. This is an area we identified for growth and potential curricular and administrative change.

*Course offerings:* The survey data and student portfolio reflections indicate that students feel that there are not enough course offerings (when they want them and with the professor they want). Class choices and scheduling of courses was among the top weaknesses reported by students in their senior survey. The department strives to offer upper division courses across all our subfields every semester. We usually have difficulty offering political theory courses every semester, however, and this impacts our ability to deliver on SLO 1 as discussed above. Moreover, in the past three years we have been somewhat constrained in our upper division offerings by having some faculty members working out of the department. Our policy area (part of the major and the Law and Policy Minor) was previously weak due to an unfilled position, which has now been filled. Course offerings is a marginal area of concern that we feel is already improving with the addition our new(er) faculty member Jason Kalmbach, who specializes in policy analysis. The situation will improve further with the return of Tracy Slagter to her regular teaching duties next Fall.

*The capstone itself:* Our capstone was created as a culminating research experience for students as well as an opportunity for students to gather their best work and reflect on their learning across their career as a political science major. As such it has served as a very important aspect of program

assessment. However, student expectations of what the capstone should be vary from those of the department. The senior survey, in particular, points to frustration that the capstone itself doesn't "prepare students for life after college." While we do spend time on writing a professional resume and thinking (and writing) about *how* their liberal arts education and essential skills are applicable in the "real world," students yearn for more career and job placement guidance than we can provide them. Similarly, students noted that they are well "prepared for graduate school, but not for what they can realistically do with a B.S. in Political Science."

- ***What has been learned from alumni and external stake holders about how graduates of the program apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the program?***

Our graduates go into a range of fields from business and government at the local and international level to the non-profit sector and succeed in a variety of post-graduate education programs (PhD, JD, MPA, MBA, etc.). Alumni report the following aspects of their political science major training have been applicable to their post-graduate education:

- 92% state the *problem solving skills* acquired in the major have been "very helpful" or "helpful"
- 96% state the *presentation and public speaking skills* acquired in the major have been "very helpful" or "helpful"
- 92% state the *professional writing skills* acquired in the major have been "very helpful" or "helpful"
- 88% state the *ability to explain complex processes, concepts or ideas to others* that they acquired in the major have been "very helpful" or "helpful"

Reflecting on their learning experiences in the major, 75-92% of alumni reported that they "agreed" or "agreed strongly" with the following statements:

- My major prepared me to better *understand contemporary political events at home and around the world.*
- My political science classes helped me to *develop critical thinking skills.*
- My political science courses helped me to *develop my formal writing and oral communication skills.*
- I developed important *research skills* in my political science classes.
- As a result of my major, I feel better *equipped to understand ethical issues* that relate to politics.

Alumni were somewhat less likely to define themselves as *confident applying interpretive theories* to understand politics (72%) or *comfortable using and understanding statistical data* (just 57%).

Also of interest are alumni engagement scores. The survey indicates that 44% of respondents did an internship while a student; 39% served on a political campaign; and 47% volunteered off campus (these answers are not mutually exclusive). After college, however, 88% of respondents reported that they are engaged in their community – 32% are serving on a community board.

The Alumni survey results are consistent with our assessment methods in pointing up the strengths and weaknesses identified above. They suggest the need for sustained attention and curricular innovation with respect to SLOs 1 and 5; and highlight existing strengths.

- ***What components of the program are most useful for students to achieve program outcomes?***

The program is designed as a whole with upper division courses building on the knowledge and skills achieved in the 100 and 200 level courses. It is therefore difficult to pull out specific components as “useful.” The mid-career methods course is essential for student success (as we’ve defined it given our SLOs). The most important component for student success continues to be our faculty members’ commitment to student learning and their own professional development. All students are exposed to some high impact practice during their political science career.

- ***What are possible short term responses the program could make? What are long term responses that the faculty may consider at this time?***

The department decided to take several immediate actions. With respect to the senior capstone course we have moved the student defense of their research up to 5<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. The defense remains a panel of three faculty members per student and continues to be geared toward assessing the students’ ability to formulate a research question, situate it in the most appropriate literature, and specify a research method. The earlier time frame means that this meeting is about collaborating with the student to improve upon their research plan and to engage them in a serious process of revision that will result in a better final project. Additionally, this year (2015-2016) we have decided to allow students to depart from the D2L format for their e-portfolio as many students find the D2L eP tool stifling and uncreative. Finally, students will be asked to complete their senior survey during the semester, rather than after the semester when they are otherwise concerned with graduation and are less likely to complete the survey. The core assessment pieces of the course remain intact (the portfolio requirements themselves, including the reflection pieces, and the MFT).

Over the next period we will consider a more concrete assessment piece for the methods (245) course. We are looking into developing a common assignment that really hones in on achievement of the beginning level statistical and research design skills that we want to see in 245 (SLOs 5.c, 5.d, and 5.e).

In the longer term we have started a conversation about how to best structure our curriculum to meet our student learning goals associated with our theory competency (SLO 1). Political theory is a subfield in political science, but it is the only one for which we do not have an introductory course. As a result our upper division courses in this subfield must provide students with a broad introduction as well as in-depth investigation and analysis of specific thinkers, concepts, and / or approaches. We are looking closely at the possibility of developing an introductory course as a potential way forward in this area; but are very conscious of not wanting to complicate the major for students or add credits to degree.

Also in the long term we have begun to think about how the capstone course may be reworked to help students make explicit connections between their USP / Liberal Arts education, their major experiences and their life plans and goals. The first step has been asking students to archive learning reflections in all their courses, including at the 100-200 level related to the essential learning outcomes as well as our political science learning outcomes. This practice is in place for some, but

not all, faculty members. Formalizing and strengthening these practices in support of the capstone is ‘work to be done’ during the next three to four years.

**[TABLE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND PROGRAM RESPONSES (SEE: APPENDIX 3)]**

**SECTION FOUR: PROGRAM’S RESPONSE TO ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

Describe the program’s response to the analysis and interpretation of data in this section.

***A. How was the assessment data used to make changes in your curriculum, instruction, student learning, or your program assessment plan?***

We adjusted (eliminated nearly all) prerequisites for the majority of our upper division courses to make it easier for students in the major and from other majors to enroll in courses and complete their studies on time. Our courses are cross listed with a variety of other inter-disciplinary programs.

We created a new experimental course explicitly for study aboard to allow students and faculty greater flexibility.

Over the past two - three years we have created and taught six *new* Quest courses aligned with our departmental learning goals and those of USP. Other existing courses were modified to achieve Quest II and III USP learning goals. As a result of assessment data (in particular student and alumni comments about availability of upper division courses) we have decided to cut back slightly on the number of Quest I and III courses we can offer regularly for USP as it detracts from our ability to offer courses at the upper division level.

Additionally, new upper division courses were created in the Law and Policy Minor to address issues with perceived lack of options or breadth in *policy* offerings by alumni and graduates; including a policy focused capstone option for the Minor (PS315).

To reinforce best practice for instruction we have asked all department faculty to *explicitly* include on their syllabi concrete student learning outcomes that are clearly aligned with our political science learning goals. A shared Instructional Resources folder provides “tips and tricks” for syllabus construction and writing course level student learning outcomes.

Beginning in Fall 2015 we have made the capstone ePortfolio requirement more flexible to allow students greater creativity; and we have refocused their efforts on the reflective pieces. Likewise we have gone to an earlier defense of their research to provide formative assessment opportunities to strengthen student achievement of our methods goals (particularly SLO 5.e) and provide the student with feedback from a broad range of faculty (see section 3 above).

We are not making substantial changes to our assessment plan – the pieces remain the same. We will however, ask / require our graduating students to take the senior survey prior to the end of the term to increase the response rate (see section 3 above).

Administratively we are retooling our advising procedures and supporting materials for faculty. We are developing an advising “packet” for faculty with a checklist of reminders, resources, and

suggested topics for discussion as they engage in major advising. This is an area where we can perhaps address students' desire for more "real life" and "what can I do with my degree" anxiety.

We are also retooling our internship and career materials to help students engage better with career services and find appropriate internships. We have a strong tradition of working with students individually to complete academic internships for credit. We will additionally encourage students to complete internships on their own (without a faculty member) with the intent to increase the number of students who complete internships and are gaining the skills needed for active civic engagement (SLO 4.d.).

***B. Who is involved in making decisions about changes to the program?***

All faculty members of the department are involved in making decisions regarding changes to the program or curriculum. These decisions are discussed broadly as strategic directions in the summer meeting and then taken up throughout the year as concrete actions by department committees, in particular the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment committee. All final actions are discussed and approved by the department as a whole.

***C. How are changes reported to faculty?***

All final actions are discussed and approved by the department as a whole. These actions are recorded in department minutes and a part of regular departmental conversations and business. Additionally we keep a running record of all formal course (form A and B) and program (form C) changes on a shared drive accessible by all department members.

***D. How will the effectiveness of any changes made be tracked and reported in the next reporting cycle?***

The effectiveness of changes is tracked and reported through the department assessment process described in Section 2. The most important part of this process is the collaborative summer meeting at which yearly assessment data is reviewed. The two-year time frame of program reporting is too short to really assess programmatic changes that are designed to affect an entering cohort. We would expect to see changes in the range of three to four years.