Political Science Department
University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Assessment Plan

Mission Statement:
Political Science is a traditional Liberal Arts program. It provides students with the intellectual skills and substantive knowledge that are necessary to be able to analyze and interpret political events and governmental processes. Substantively, the program emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge about the American political system and other political systems found throughout the world. It also seeks to instill an understanding of international relations, and appreciation of the history and values of the western tradition in political philosophy and knowledge of the fundamental concepts involved in the study of political behavior.

Program Objectives:
To offer students an undergraduate program of study in Political Science that provides them with the intellectual skills necessary to be able to analyze and interpret political events and governmental processes.

The major also seeks to prepare students for post-graduate endeavors including the pursuit of professional and graduate school opportunities as well as public and private sector employment.

Specific Learning Objectives:
Learning objectives fall into two categories: 1) substantive knowledge central to political science and 2) intellectual skills applicable to political science as well as in other contexts.

Substantive Knowledge:

a) essential information regarding the operation of the American political system.

b) a basic knowledge of the types of political systems in existence throughout the world.

c) an understanding of the political interactions involved in international relations.

d) an appreciation of the history of western political thought and the values inherent in that tradition.
e) knowledge of the fundamental concepts involved in the study of political behavior.

Intellectual Skills:

a) the ability to gather and assess the value of information.
b) the ability to analyze empirical data.
c) the ability to communicate in written, oral and electronic contexts.
d) the ability to engage in independent inquiry and analysis.

Implementation of Objectives:

These objectives are implemented via a developmental course structure and the requirements of the major.

Developmental Course Structure:

100 and 200 level courses emphasize the development of critical thinking and the understanding of basic concepts of political analysis. This is accomplished through the use of extensive written work including, but not limited to book reviews, essay examinations, oral presentations, critical essays.

Central to the program is Political Science 200, Political Science Analysis which provides majors with knowledge concerning the growth and development of political science as a discipline as well as an overview of the fields and areas of specialization within Political Science. The course also provides an introduction to modes of political analysis, including research design, quantitative and qualitative methods, principles of data collection and provides students with the opportunity to engage in elementary data analysis. Beginning in 1996-97 majors enrolled in Pols 200 will begin developing a portfolio of the written work they produce in this and all other political science courses. The portfolio will include papers, essay exams, book reviews and other written assignments. Portfolios will be kept by each student’s advisor. Course syllabi will indicate what material from that course needs to be copied and placed in the portfolio. The portfolio requirement was eliminated when it proved to be unworkable and impractical in practice.

300 & 400 level courses emphasize deeper analysis of specific topics within political science and the development of independent research and analysis skills on the part of students. This is accomplished via extensive
written work, empirical analysis, simulations, research papers and projects.

The culmination of the major is **Political Science 480**, a seminar in which students review the process of conducting research in Political Science. Students are exposed to current research in various fields of Political Science and choose a topic for independent research which they conduct with faculty guidance. The results of student’s research is presented to the class and critiqued by fellow students and faculty members. Copies of the final papers from the seminar have been retained by the department since 1995. In addition the course includes components directed towards career development and preparation for job searches as well as graduate and professional school applications.

**Major Requirements:**

The distribution requirements of the major include an exposure to all the areas of knowledge indicated above. It also requires a minimum of 15 credits at the 300 level of higher in order to insure that students engage in more sophisticated intellectual analysis as they progress through the program. Finally, the senior seminar is designed as the culmination of the program requiring students to demonstrate their ability to engage in independent analysis and their knowledge of a particular subject of analysis within political science.

**Evaluating the Objectives:**

The learning objectives will be evaluated using the following procedures:

1) A yearly departmental review of the syllabi for the previous year’s course offerings to determine if the instructional techniques, course assignments, course requirements and evaluation procedures conform to the developmental design of the curriculum. This review will be done collectively and the results summarized in a one page statement. **This procedure was eliminated after three years by which time the department’s collective syllabi had all meet the departmental curricular design.**

2) Evaluation of the papers and presentations produced in the Senior Seminar by all the members of the department to determine if they are meeting our expectations of the work that should be produced by a graduating senior. This evaluation will be summarized in a one page statement. **Beginning in 2000, electronic copies of all seminar papers were submitted. That year powerpoint presentation were also required and the files were submitted as part of the final assignment. Previous years’ papers have now been scanned.**
3) Assessment of the completed portfolios of graduating seniors to determine the intellectual growth of each student as well as the level of intellectual sophistication the student has reached as they graduate from the University. The portfolios will first be assessed by the student’s advisor who will provide a one page summary for the department to review. The results of all the portfolio reviews will be compiled in a yearly statement. The portfolio aspect of the assessment plan was dropped after a few years for because it became apparent that it was too cumbersome to keep track of the assignments, there was no easy way to enforce the requirement and we did not find an efficient and effective way to evaluate the portfolios that had been created.

4) Focus group interviews with graduating seniors to assess their satisfaction and evaluation of the strengths of the program as well as to receive feedback regarding improvements that could be made. This group interview will be done within the context of the Senior Seminar. In the seminar the students will first respond to a written survey (instrument attached). The results will be compiled and will be the basis of the questions asked in the interview. The results of the surveys and interview will be presented in a yearly one page document. Only one focus group was conducted. Based on that experience, it became apparent that there was a conflict of interest having the members of the department conducted the focus group. If there was a way to have an outside person conduct the focus group, we would reinstitute this requirement.

5) Review of the surveys of current students and recent alumni that occur as part of the 5 year program review process. We are in the process of conducting our 5 year program review.

Use of Results:

Each year the department will collectively review the the results of the above evaluations. A yearly report will be compiled which will indicate what, if any, changes need to be make to individual courses, as well as the overall major, in order to correct any deficiencies we perceive in either the substantive knowledge or intellectual skills of our graduates.

Modifications to our courses and program are on-going. A major review of the program will be done this year in conjunction with our program review.