

Program Assessment: *Annual Report*

Program(s): MA in Political Science and Public Affairs

Department: Political Science

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences

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1. Which program student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

Students will be able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies.

2. What data/artifacts of student learning were collected for each assessed outcome? Were Madrid student artifacts included?

The department's assessment of the MA learning outcome above included the six graduate seminars below taught by POLS faculty in 2018-2019. Madrid had no POLS MA students in 2018-2019.

POLS 5171 Law, Policy, Society
POLS 5300 Law, Politics and Regulatory Policy
POLS 5325 Public Sector Budgeting
POLS 5520 Political Change
POLS 5650 War, Peace, and Politics
POLS 5930 Race, Class, and Punishment

Instructors responded to these questions on a Qualtrics survey:

1. How did your class contribute to this goal?
2. Which of these instruments did you use to assess student learning for this report? (Options are: one or more essays; one or more test or exam questions; a final project/ describe; and other/describe.)
3. By the end of class, how well could students analyze the values that inform political institutions, as appropriate for the level of the class?
4. By the end of class, how well could students analyze the values that inform political behavior, as appropriate for the level of the class?
5. By the end of class, how well could students analyze the values that inform policies, as appropriate for the level of the class?
6. How well could students analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies? 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.
7. Of the students who are in the MA program, what percentage did not meet expectations (could not analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)??
8. Of the students who are in the MA program, what percentage met expectations (could analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)?
9. Of the students who are in the MA program, how many exceeded expectations (were exceptionally able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)?

10. Of the students who are not in the MA program, how many did not meet expectations (could not analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)?
11. Of the students who are not in the MA program, how many met expectations (could analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)?
12. Of the students who are not in the MA program, how many exceeded expectations (were exceptionally able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies)?
13. What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies?
14. Do you have suggestions for changing the BA curriculum or approaches in individual courses in order to make sure that students will be able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies?
15. Is there anything you want to add about your students' learning?
16. Do you have any comments to improve this reporting process?

In addition to instructors' responses to the Qualtrics survey, we assessed students' responses to MA field exam questions to determine whether students demonstrated ability to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies.

3. How did you analyze the assessment data? What was the process? Who was involved?

NOTE: If you used rubrics as part of your analysis, please include them in an appendix.

Department Chair Ellen Carnaghan organized the assessment process, devising the Qualtrics survey, and reminding faculty throughout the year of the learning outcome being assessed. Instructors for selected graduate seminars were asked to respond to the questions listed above. Each course instructor decided how to measure whether or not a student had met the learning outcome expectations. The Coordinator of Graduate Studies summarized responses to each question and wrote this report. In addition to the Qualtrics survey, the Department assessed student responses to the MA field exam that all students are required to take at the beginning of their final semester in the program.

4. What did you learn from the data? Summarize the major findings of your analysis for each assessed outcome.

NOTE: If necessary, include any tables, charts, or graphs in an appendix.

Findings based on the Qualtrics survey:

Q1 - This year, we agreed to examine this learning outcome: Students will be able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies. 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 5325. Group projects that addressed problems in Rock Hill city government that were brought to the class by the City Administrator. As part of the project, students asked the city officials what were the chief values that informed public budgeting at the local level and how those values specifically informed their particular problems. The students identified accountability and transparency to the public as the chief values driving the overall process. In the streets group, they identified "Neighborhood Equity/Fairness" as the key value. In pensions, they identified "Efficiency". In salaries, they identified "Equity/Parity with Other Local Officials." In the Police body cam group, they identified "Accountability to the public" as the chief value.

POLS 5171. Students study the connections between political institutions, behavior, and policies

with particular focus on how groups form and influence policy as announced by the Supreme Court and other institutions. Students are also exposed to theory regarding the roles of law, politics, and public opinion in judicial decisionmaking and the normative implications of such influences.

POLS 5520. While most of the course focused on the empirical analysis of various forms of political change, I assigned multiple readings of a more normative nature in order to encourage students to think about how values shape political institutions, behaviors, and policies (and also how they shape our analysis of these phenomena). Students reflected on these issues in required weekly response papers (1 page each).

POLS 5650. Students studied classics of international security (Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, etc) to explore the strategic environment current leaders behave to make policy. I taught them various units and security institutions (army, navy, air force, marine corps, the white house, the department of defense).

POLS 5300. Students understand value-oriented questions in the context of administrative law; the values that provide the value framework for public policy making and implementation by our public administrators, as well as the values that drive court opinions. To accomplish this objective, students are assigned an administrative law chapter each week and we discuss the chapter. Each week a student is assigned to summarize the highlights of the chapter. This forces the student to really read and understand well at least one chapter because the student has the responsibility of summarizing it and presenting it to the class and reacting to questions about his/her summary. I also make students brief cases, one each week, and we go over the values that go into a court decision. That is, what is the legal issue and what decision did the court reach on administrative actions and why? What values did the court employ to reach the decision that it did? We then discuss the majority decision, as well as any dissenting opinions to understand the reasons for why certain judges dissented. We discuss the agency action and why the action was upheld or overruled. We apply principles, doctrines, etc. to court decisions to try to understand what helps to guide court decisions and agency behavior.... Students, in briefing cases, are forced to read and understand the case because they must include in their briefs the relevant facts, legal issue(s) to be decided, the court's decision, the reason for the court's decision, and the significance of the case. This forces students to think about the competing values in the case since there are always at least two sides to the issue expressed in the case. I also have students write a major 25-27 page seminar on an administrative law topic. This forces students to think seriously about administrative law values in the context of agency decision making in various public policy areas.

POLS 5930. The course explored questions about how and why mass incarceration has developed in the US and connecting this to broader political developments. By looking at competing scholarly explanations of the buildup and major shifts in US governance over time, as well as interrogating our own conceptions of crime and punishment, students looked very deeply into how ideology (values) inform institutions, behavior and policies. In terms of the types of assignments, the students had to complete weekly response papers analyzing and synthesizing this type of literature as well as develop their own research projects which all touched on institutional and policy development

Q2 - Which of these instruments did you use to assess student learning for this report?

- 3 reported one or more essays
- 3 reported a final project. These were the projects:

- Presentation of results for group projects researching problems in Rock Hill city government to the class and to the RH City Administrator. The project also included assignments in which the students had to research a particular problem, which involved interviewing Rock Hill city officials.
 - Final paper requiring students to apply two classic approaches (Clausewitz and Sun Tzu)to three of the course topics students choose to write about
 - 25 page seminar paper applying apply procedural due process values in agency decision making
- 1 reported one or more exam or test questions
 - 2 reported other instruments:
 - class room discussion, including student leadership of discussions and written discussion points
 - extensive readings, class discussions focusing institutional values of public agencies in the context of due process principles and the rule of law

Q3 - By the end of class, students in my class could analyze the values that inform political institutions, as appropriate for the level of the class.

- 3 faculty agreed strongly
- 3 faculty agreed somewhat
- None disagreed or responded “neither agree nor disagree.”

Q4 - By the end of class, students in my class could analyze the values that inform political behavior, as appropriate for the level of the class.

- 1 faculty agreed strongly
- 4 faculty agreed somewhat
- 1 class did not address this part of the outcome.

Q5 - By the end of class, students in my class could analyze the values that inform policies, as appropriate for the level of the class.

- 4 faculty agreed strongly
- 2 faculty agreed somewhat
- None disagreed or responded “neither agree nor disagree.”

Q6 - How well could students analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies? 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 students were skilled at understanding how values and interest come to influence institutional structures, behavior, and policies.
- Another instructor commented that students were good at connecting the broader literature on ideology and political development to the particular institutional development and policies within the CJ system. That was the focus of the course.

Questions about individual actors and public opinion were less central.

- Another instructor commented that students were more skilled at analyzing how values inform policy than at understanding how values inform institutions and behaviors.
- Students were better at understanding the basics of international and national security policies in classic texts than they were at applying the ideas to analyze current events.
- With challenging materials, some students make the effort required and others do not.

Detailed comments from 6 instructors are below.

Overall, I think each group met my expectations. A lot of this has to do with the level of preparation Jennifer Yackley and I gave them. Jennifer made available city data going back many years and encouraged students to communicate directly with the heads of departments like Police and Public Works. I could have done a better job in integrating in class discussions the groups' progress in their projects. Because I wanted to cover all the material covered in the syllabus we missed some opportunities to discuss the students' work-in-progress. We did, however, incorporate some of their findings in the discussion of debt management and how cities get their revenues. So, even though the question asks what my students could do well and what they could do less well, I think some part of what they didn't do as well might be attributed to not enough discussion in class before the final presentation. However, I don't want to over-emphasize this because overall the projects met my expectations and Jennifer's. Actually, Jennifer was very impressed by the students.

Students were skilled at understanding how values and interest come to influence institutional structures, behavior, and policies (including judicial policies), particularly in light of scholarship on interest groups and social movements. Overall, this group of students did a very good job with these concepts. When students struggled, it was because their strong feelings about how the world should work clouded their assessments of empirical evidence regarding how it works.

Students were better at analyzing how values inform policy than at understanding how values inform institutions and behaviors, although they made progress on the latter two areas as well.

In part because the reading materials were drawn heavily from the classics and major works in the literature, students did well in learning the basics about how security institutions work, how actors behave in conflict situations, and what policies they seek to adopt to avoid conflict and win wars when necessary. However, in part because students were less exposed to current affairs than they could have been, they did less well in terms of analyzing current affairs related to institutions and policies (for instance, what theory would explain the crisis in Venezuela, negotiations with Iran and North Korea, etc.) Balancing between the two is not always easy, but this semester I decided to focus on the former to ensure that students learn the basics through classics and major literature, rather than making the class one of current-event or policy-heavy class. Most of the students turned out to have never been exposed to the study of international and national security, so I feel comfortable with the decision despite some trade-off involved.

Of the four students in the graduate section, two of them understood administrative values and were able to intelligently apply them in class discussions and to their research/seminar papers. These two students presented excellent seminar paper.... Both of these students also participated in the seminar a lot, being able to answer questions the other students could not answer. In fact, without them the seminar would have failed because few other students understood the material well enough to feel comfortable in participating. The other two students did not seem to get it. Most students do not really "get it" because the subject matter is too challenging and they do not seem to want to make the commitment to really understand the material. Administrative law readings are tedious and difficult, so students must apply themselves to understand the content.... At our last class meeting, I asked students what they learned...and most did give

encouraging reasons, conveying that they had learned the basics about the values of administrative law and were now in a much better position to understand the legal parameters that guide administrative decision making.

The students varied in terms of their strengths in reading comprehension and the depth/topic of their research projects. The two students who chose to look at the connection between neoliberalism and the rise of the carceral state were exceptionally proficient in this goal - this was both a function of the focus of their research and their strength as students (one of whom was by far the strongest student in the course). What they could do well was connect the broader literature on ideology and political development to the particular institutional development and policies within the CJ system. Even the students who were less explicitly looking at this connection did a nice job of linking how perceptions of crime and values related to punishment effect policies and institutions. There was a lot less emphasis in the course related to behavior and therefore less opportunities for them to demonstrate this skill. While we discussed and explored questions about individual actors and public opinion - these were secondary to broader historical and political developments that better captured institutions and policies.

Questions 7-12.

Faculty in the courses where measurement took place report that all students in the MA program either met or exceeded expectations. In two courses, all students met expectations. In one course, a third exceeded expectations.

Some students not in the MA failed to meet expectations, but the data are unclear because some faculty reported number of students and some reported percentages.

Q13 - What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies?

- **Interacting with public officials.** Asking them about what values informed the budgetary process and specific policies. The in-class discussions where we addressed the importance of understanding the values that inform the process and the text, which also dealt with how democratic values underlie the budgetary process at all levels.
- **Questions related to values informing political institutions, behavior, and policies.** Also, students produced discussion points for all readings and tended towards those types of analyses.
- **Using a few explicitly normative texts** was useful in encouraging students to think about the role of values both in political institutions/behaviors/policies and also in research on these issues. Students were often uncomfortable at the beginning of these conversations, believing that such topics were not germane to political "science" but by the end of the semester they were fairly articulate on these types of issues.
- **Go over the assignments as early as possible in each class to ensure student understanding.** In-class debate on controversial security topics like the use of drones in war was also instrumental in drawing out student understanding.
- **The seminar paper. Class discussions where they were asked to answer questions about values in administrative law. That is, they were forced to read, brief, and analyze court decisions** where conflicting values are presented in majority v. dissenting decisions. Each week a different student was asked to summarize and present a book chapter. This forced students to really understand the difficult legal materials in the chapter in order to summarize.
- **Assigning readings where this is a central focus of the scholarly work. In addition to**

that, building accountability for the reading through various in- class discussion techniques (such as requiring they bring questions/quotes/discussion points to class. Writing assignments that required them to engage critically with the readings and focus on big questions that would make them tackle the particular area of focus. Discussion questions that fairly explicitly addressed this goal.

Q14 - Do you have suggestions for changing the BA curriculum or approaches in individual courses in order to make sure that students will be able to analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies?

- **More guest speakers and integrating elected and non-elected officials** into more of our pedagogy.
- **Include more explicitly normative work** in order to push students to think in this direction.
- **Constantly ask students to evaluate the values that stand behind out political institutions.**
- **Some degree of historical contextualizing of policies/institutions/behavior** is important for helping students to develop an ability to analyze how values inform these.

There were two positive comments about the success of our existing curriculum:

- The students in this class were a testament to what is already being done.
- Overall, I think that our department does a pretty good job forcing students to interpret how our political institutions function in the context of competing values that drive them. Our undergraduate students are often better than our graduate students

Q15 - Is there anything you want to add about your students' learning?

- This is the 6th or 7th time I have done this and the students seem to get a lot out of it.
- Overall, I have been very pleased with student learning in our department. Naturally, I have had some very poor students, but overall the students have performed quite well, while some (two of them this semester in this seminar) performed very well. Both students handed in papers that were excellent with one being the about the best paper I have ever received in administrative law.

Q16 - Do you have any comments to improve this reporting process?

- Simply asking faculty to present very candid evaluations of our students.

Findings based on MA field exams:

Two students who specifically addressed “values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policies” earned a “pass with distinction” on their exam responses:

- One public policy student responded to a question about organizational culture, operating procedures and problem-solving orientation.” His response “showed an ability to analyze the value dimensions of organizations and their impact on the likelihood of a productive partnership.”

- One political theory student responded to a question about how Aristotle’s Politics and Locke’s 2nd Treatise might inform one’s reading of Marxist political economy” and a question that required evaluating scholars’ contributions “to our understanding of the origins and developments of the U.S. carceral state.” His response to the first essay showed how Marx’s view of “species-being as expressed in ‘Estranged Labor’ is informed by an Aristotelian human nature and his understanding of value and labor are responses to Lockean liberalism.”

One international affairs student who earned a “pass” showed adequate ability to analyze the values that inform NGOs and other international organizations in the context of U.S. foreign policy.

One international affairs student who earned a “pass” deftly handled normative issues related to alternative strategies for handling commitment problems in authoritarian and democratic regimes and in an anarchic international system.

One American politics student who earned a “pass” responded to a question about whether most Americans have ideologies and what “the normative implications for democracy” might be of whether voters have ideologies. Although the question spoke to the learning outcome, the student’s response “only briefly considered the normative implications of voters having ideologies.” It is not clear how well the student can analyze the values that inform political institutions, behavior, and policy.

5. How did your analysis inform meaningful change? How did you *use the analyzed data to make or implement recommendations for change* in pedagogy, curriculum design, or your assessment plan?

Faculty discuss results of each year’s assessment at the fall department 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. Any changes based on assessment results reported in Q4 above will be determined by department faculty at the department retreat in fall 2019.

Based on results summarized above and results of the 2018 Assessment report, possible items for discussion at the fall 2019 retreat include:

- Why, or in what ways, did some students fall short of expectations on the learning outcome assessed?
- Effective tactics for teaching students to analyze values of political institutions, behaviors, and policies
- Why some students are not comfortable discussing values/normative issues as part of political science
- Continuing discussion of research design, literature review, methodological choices, and public presentations

The graduate coordinator shares learning outcomes with MA students every fall and invites their comments. When time allows, this is done in the mandatory orientation for MA students at the beginning of every fall semester.

Inspired by the performance of students on the field exam, faculty in the international affairs concentration proposed changes to the concentration requirements. Those changes have been approved by the department and will be submitted to the CAS curriculum committee in the fall.

6. Did you follow up (“close the loop”) on past assessment work? If so, what did you learn? (For example, has that curriculum change you made two years ago manifested in improved student learning today, as evidenced in your recent assessment data and analysis?)

Starting in the 2016-2017 academic year, the department moved to a Qualtrics survey for collecting assessment data from faculty.

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.

Assessments results reported in 2018 were shared with faculty and discussed in the Department’s fall 2018 retreat. In 2019, the Department assessed a different learning outcome. At the 2019 retreat, in addition to discussing finding of our 2019 assessment, we will revisit 2018 findings to learn how faculty are responding and encourage continuing attention to the strategies suggested in 2018. That list is below.

1. The June 2018 assessment report included a summary of strategies used by faculty to improve students’ ability to explain the results of their research in public forums and justify their methodological choices (the learning outcome that was assessed in 2018). Suggestions at the fall 2018 retreat included:
 - Oral presentations of research articles and students’ own research designs
 - Providing a rubric for assessing such presentations. Two rubrics were shared.
 - Inviting in public-speaking professionals or SLU FPA faculty specializing in oral presentations. We have started discussion with faculty in the department of Communication and hope to organize an event in the coming academic year.
2. In addition, faculty discussed problems many students have producing literature reviews, which are important for developing a research design and justifying methodological choices. Some observations and suggestions faculty made were:
 - Students need more attention to research design, including possibly emphasizing research design more in the Research Methods course.
 - Faculty need to expect that graduate students will need help writing a research question, completing a literature review, and developing a research design in all their seminars. These skills are not learned once in the methods class. Our students haven’t done a lot of research other than in the seminars and, depending on the instructor, in the Methods class.
3. Specific strategies that faculty have found useful for improving students’ ability to identify and review literature relevant to their proposed research were:
 - Asking students, “What is the thing you want to know about, or what is the thing you think might be true?”;
 - Using journal articles to find out why scholars are talking about this and what it has to do with a particular literature;
 - Progressively raising expectations. In a lower-level class it might be enough to summarize what an author says, but in an MA class students should be expected to shape ideas into coherent themes.
4. Faculty discussed strategies for handling unmotivated undergrads in 4000/5000 dual-numbered courses, students coming into graduate classes having little experience with prior

research, and helping graduate students approach learning more as independent inquiry. Some observations and suggestions were:

- The structure of their education at SLU is such that students are not allowed much self-direction, which makes it a struggle for faculty to get students more self-motivated.
- Faculty might consider letting graduating seniors out of the final exam if they wanted to develop one of their early essays instead..
- Assigning discussants in the class is useful.
- Depending on the course, it's a good idea to have essays due well before the end of the Spring semester.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any revised/updated assessment plans to the University Assessment Coordinator along with this report.