**Political Science Program**

**University of Alaska Anchorage**

**Educational Effectiveness**

# Assessment Plan

**Version IV**

Reviewed with curriculum changes by the Academic Assessment Committee as an information item: 5/4/18

Reviewed by the Faculty Senate as an information item: 5/4/18

Introduction

This document defines the educational objectives and expected outcomes for the Political Science program at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and outlines a plan for assessing the achievement of the stated objectives and outcomes.

The Educational Effectiveness Plan for the Political Science program at UAA was developed by the faculty of the program at the behest of the UAA administration over a number of years. The first steps in Educational Effectiveness Assessment were taken at UAA in the late 1990s under the campus-wide leadership of Will Jacobs who was then a member of the Political Science Faculty. The Political Science Department had also been subjected to a Special Program Review over the 1999-2000 academic year which had collectively involved the Political Science faculty in assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and products of the program. The recommendations from the Special Review process served as a starting point for the Educational Effectiveness Assessment Plan. Over the 2000 – 2001 academic year, the political science faculty participated in a series of departmental meetings to develop the Educational Effectiveness Assessment Plan. The plan was adopted at the final departmental meeting of the academic year in May 2001 and was then first implemented in the 2001- 2002 academic year. Subsequent to the 2002-3 implementation, the faculty adopted the recommendation to revise Outcome 2 over the 2003-4 academic year.

At departmental meetings in January and February 2004, the revision was adopted. Former Outcome two was split into two outcomes (now Outcomes 2 and 3) to be separately measured.

Program Outcomes

A UAA Student graduating with a BA degree in Political Science should:

* Demonstrate the ability to write clear and precise English prose.
* Demonstrate the ability to understand basic principles of American government.
* Demonstrate the ability to understand relationship between the United States and the larger world.
* Demonstrate the ability to identify and criticize competing political science arguments.
* Demonstrate the ability to identify and interpret important political texts.
* Demonstrate the ability to write a satisfactory senior-level research paper.
* Demonstrate knowledge of each recognized field within political science.

**Table 1**

#### Program Outcomes Assessment Tools and Administration

| **Tool** | **Description** | **Frequency/ Start Date** | **Collection Method** | **Administered by** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Tool #1 | Senior Essay | Every Spring/2002 | In PS 492 | PS 492 Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #2 | Comprehensive Exam | Every Spring/2002 | In PS 492 | PS 492 Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #3 | Senior Seminar | Every Spring/2002 | In PS 492 | PS 492 Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #4 | PS 341 or 342 (grade)  | Every Fall/2004 | In PS 341/342 | PS 341/342Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #5 | American principles exam question PS 330 | EveryFall/2004 | In PS 330 | PS 330Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #6 | US and the world examQuestion for PS 322 or 321 | Every Fall/2004 | In PS 322/321 | PS 322/321Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #7 | Exit Survey | Every Spring/2002 | In PS 492 | PS 492 Faculty/Instructor |
| Tool #8 | Alumni Survey | Annual 2007 | By (e)mail | Dept. Admin.Assistant |

**Table 2**

#### Association of Assessment Tools to Program Outcomes

|  | Senior Essay | Comprehensive Exam | Senior Seminar | PS 341/342 grade | PS 330 Exam Question | PS 322/321 Exam Question | Exit Survey | Alumni Survey |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Demonstrate the ability to write clear and precise English prose. | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate the ability to understand basic principles of American government. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate the ability to understand the relationship between the United States and the larger world. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate the ability to identify and criticize competing political science arguments. | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate the ability to identify and interpret important political texts. | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate the ability to write a satisfactory senior-level research paper. | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Demonstrate knowledge of each recognized field within political science. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

0 = Tool is not used to measure the associated objective.

1 = Tool is used to measure the associated objective.

Assessment Implementation & Analysis for Program Improvement

General Implementation Strategy

The Political Science Department embarked on implementing its plan in the 2001 – 2002 academic year with a carefully conceived Senior Seminar (PS492) and elements designed and created for this purpose (Senior Essay, Comprehensive Exam), administered for the first time in Spring 2002. In addition an Exit Survey was designed and implemented. These instruments were refined during the 2002-3 academic year and employed again in spring 2003 to generate the 2003 Educational Effectiveness Assessment Plan which was submitted to comply with universal reporting requirements. The plan was again revised in 2003-4 for implementation in Spring 2004. The Alumni Survey will be implemented in April 2007, five years after the graduation of the first assessed graduates.

Method of Data Analysis and Formulation of Recommendations for Program Improvement

The Political Science faculty will meet three times a year – in September, January and April – for Educational Effectiveness Assessment purposes. At the September meeting the Political Science faculty will review the data collected using the assessment tools. This meeting will adopt a plan for implementing recommended changes designed to enhance performance relative to the program’s outcomes, and communicating the changes to all the program’s stakeholders. The January meeting will monitor implementation of the recommended changes and update the assessment plan. The April meeting will focus on the administration of the measurement instruments to be employed at the end of the spring term. The data collection, interpretation of the results, and the recommended programmatic changes will be incorporated into the Educational Effectiveness Assessment Report forwarded to the office of Academic Affairs (in the required format) by the end of May each year.

Modification of the Assessment Plan

The Political Science faculty, at their October meeting each year, after reviewing the collected data and the processes used to collect it, will review and refine the assessment plan. Changes may be made to any component of the plan, including the objectives, outcomes, assessment tools, or any other aspect of the plan. The changes will be approved by the faculty of the program and forwarded to the dean/director’s office and the Office of Academic Affairs.

Appendix A: SENIOR ESSAY

Tool Description:

The senior essay written for Political Science A492, Senior Seminar in Politics, is the culminating research paper for senior-level students in political science, demonstrating their ability to explore an important question in the field and to develop and make a cogent argument about it. Topics and approaches for the senior essay should be developed by students in consultation with the instructor of the senior seminar by a date set each year by the instructor. Topics will often, but not necessarily, be related to the theme of the senior seminar. Students are encouraged, however, to choose topics and approaches according to their own scholarly interests, predilections, experience, and talents, and some of the best senior essays arise from strong interests on the part of the student that may not be directly related to the theme of the senior seminar.

The general expectation is that the senior essay should be approximately 10,000 words. Senior essays are graded by a faculty member in the department, usually but not always the instructor of the senior seminar.

Students taking Political Science A492 who are not majors in Political Science may be allowed more latitude in writing the senior essay required for the seminar, at the discretion of the instructor. Political Science majors who are University Honors candidates and who work on their senior project for a full year are expected either to do a second semester-long project or to write a longer senior essay, generally 20,000 words.

Factors that affect the collected data:

All graduating students taking the BA in Political Science must take the Senior Seminar and thus will write this essay. Despite advising, some students take the course prior to their final semester, thus the measure my not gauge their ultimate attainment of disciplinary knowledge.

How to interpret the data:

For assessing writing ability and mastery of presentation style this provides clear demonstration. Ability to identify different arguments and texts will reflect individual scholarship and different levels of commitment. In assessing the products, one must take into account that at each offering there will be a different topic which may account for some difference in student engagement and outcomes: some popular or fashionable topics may attract a larger enrollment and more enthusiastic essay-writing.

Appendix B: COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

Tool Description:

The Comprehensive Exam, administered at the end of the Senior Seminar in Politics (required of all PS graduates), requires students to write answers to five questions, each of which provides the student the opportunity to demonstrate that they can apply the perspectives of the recognized sub-fields of the discipline of political science to the topic of the Senior Seminar. There is one question for each of the recognized subfields: Comparative Politics; International Relations; Political Philosophy; American Government; and Political Behavior.

Factors that affect the collected data:

Since all Political Science majors specialize (to a minor degree) in a subfield, each student should be expected to demonstrate more mastery of one than of the other subfields in the Comprehensive Exam. Varying grade outcomes for different subfields might reflect different standards being used by different faculty members or differing degrees of severity in grading.

How to interpret the data:

This data will demonstrate whether graduating Political Science students have mastered the various subfields of the discipline.

Collecting and comparing the grades attained for the questions on the subfields will indicate whether any subfields are consistently faring poorly.

Sample Comprehensive Examination attached

Appendix C: Senior Seminar

Tool Description:

The Senior Seminar in Politics (PS492) is designed as the capstone course for the program. All program faculty collaborate in offering the course with one faculty member choosing the topic focus and other faculty bringing their subfield perspectives to bear on the topic. In this forum, students observe their faculty as practicing political scientists, interacting with one another over their disciplinary subject matter. The Senior Seminar allows a searching examination of a single major concept, issue or problem in the study of politics. In a seminar setting, each session of the class is based on extensive prepared readings, lead by different political science faculty members.

Participation of all Political Science faculty in the Senior Seminar allows for departmental discussion of student performance on the course’s various instructional goals and defined outcomes, which coincide with assessment outcomes. Identification of deficiencies can lead to adjustment of the curriculum.

Factors that affect the collected data:

Not only will the topic of the Senior Seminar reflect the predilections of the lead faculty member, so will the grading for Senior Seminar performance. However, the participation of all program faculty in grading one element (Comprehensive Exam questions) will allow for some baseline comparisons.

Although it is the intention that students take this course during their final term, scheduling difficulties (the PS Department can only offer the Senior Seminar each Spring Semester) and student choices mean that some students take it prior to their final term when they may not be fully prepared to demonstrate an exit-level grasp of the discipline of Political Science.

How to interpret the data:

The Senior Seminar generates a variety of versatile assessment tools: the Senior Essay and the Comprehensive Exam, in addition to a performance assessment, which together provide means of assessing 6 of our 7 outcome measures.

Sample PS492 Senior Seminar in Politics Course Outline attached.

Appendix D: PS 341/342 Course grade

Tool Description:

All students graduating from the Political Science Department are required to take an upper-division course on American Government: either PS 341 Congress or PS 342 The Presidency. Both courses focus on U.S. Constitutional arrangements and the basic principles underlying the separation of powers between the Executive and Legislative branches in the U. S. Presidential system. The grade that a student achieves in either course will reflect the level of mastery of this subject matter. Where students have taken both, their better grade will be used.

Factors that affect the colleted data:

Students with an emphasis in American government will be likely to have taken both courses in which case their better grade will be recorded for this measure. Their cumulative knowledge may result in their having higher grades than students with other emphases. Students may have taken these courses sometime before graduation.

How to interpret the data:

Students’ grades on PS 341 or 342 will indicate level of understanding of the basic principles of American government.

Appendix E: PS 330 Question

Tool Description:

Commencing with the next offering of PS 330 (Fall 2004), one of the questions on the PS A330 Final Exam, will be specifically designed to elicit students’ understanding of the basic principles of American Government. Given the subject matter and course description of PS 330, such a question is central to measuring the effectiveness of the course.

The question to be used follows:

In Federalist #51, James Madison writes that, “in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” In what ways does the government instituted by The Constitution of the United States of America fulfill this directive?

Factors that affect the collected data:

Students whose emphasis area is in American Government may have devoted more of their coursework to this subject matter and may do better than students with other areas of emphasis. Students may have taken PS 330 some time prior to graduation.

How to interpret data:

This data will demonstrate students grasp of basic principles of American Government.

Appendix F: PS 322/321 Question

Tool Description:

All students graduating with a BA in Political Science from UAA are required to have taken either PS 322 U. S. Foreign Policy or PS 321 International Relations. Although PS 322 specifically deals with the U.S. relationship to the rest of the world evidenced in U. S. foreign policy, the subject matter of PS 321 International Relations also inevitably incorporates the role of the U. S. in international relations and the relationship of the U. S. to the larger world. Final Exam Questions in both courses cover this U.S. role and relationship. Commencing with their next offerings (P 321 Fall 2004, PS 322 Fall 2005), a specifically designed question will be incorporated into the Final Exam of both courses. Student scores on the question for PS 322 will be gathered for assessment purposes but where a graduating PS major has not taken PS 322, his/her score on the question on PS 321 will be used.

The question to be used follows:

Describe and discuss the role of the U.S. in international relations and U.S. relations with the larger world. Provide illustrative examples to support your conclusions.

Factors that affect the collected data:

Scores on the question in PS 321 may vary from PS 322 since U. S. foreign policy is more central to PS 322 than is the U. S. role to PS 321. Students with an emphasis in International Relations may well have taken both PS 322 and PS 321 and will therefore have had more course content on this subject matter and may therefore score higher than students with other emphasis areas. Students may have taken these courses some time prior to graduation.

How to interpret this data:

This data will demonstrate students understanding of the relationship between the USA and the larger world.

Appendix G: Exit Survey

Tool Description:

Administration of the Political Science Exit Survey is designed to elicit student ratings of the Political Science program and their UAA experience as well as ensuring that we have follow-up contact details for our graduates. Exit Survey questions are related to program outcomes. A copy of the survey instrument is attached.

Surveys are administered to students after they have completed their Comprehensive Exam and results are compiled and tabulated by the Departmental Administrative Assistant after graduation.

Factors that affect the collected data:

The method of collection ensures that all graduating political science majors will have taken the survey but whether they took it as they concluded their studies is determined by whether they took the Senior Seminar and Comprehensive Exam their last semester before graduation from UAA.

How to interpret the data:

This instrument should provide a reliable measure of students’ assessments of the Political Science Program.

Sample Exit Survey attached.

Appendix H: ALUMNI SURVEY

Tool Description:

The Alumni Survey will be administered 5 years after students have graduated starting in 2007. The instrument has not yet been designed but will have items intended to gauge graduates’ assessment of their BA program relative to the program’s identified outcomes.

To ensure that, five years after graduation we still have contact information for graduates, we will collect contact data at the Exit Survey and will contact our students annually on the anniversary of their graduation with a PS newsletter that requests that they update their contact data. If current communications trend persist, it would behoove us to ensure that our Alumni Survey can be completed online or making use of the latest communications technology in addition to being available by traditional means.

Factors that affect the collected data:

We will need to take into account the return rate for the Alumni Survey: a low return rate would reduce the usefulness of the data for outcomes assessment.

How to interpret the data:

It will be interesting to see whether alumni who have jobs or professions that are based in their PS degrees are more likely to respond than alumni who have jobs that are not PS based. Only time will tell.