



2008-2009 Assessment Plan Report

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT AY 2008-2009

Report Date: June 18, 2009

School/College: [Arts and Sciences]

Department/Program: [Politics]

Person completing the Report: [Brian Weiner]

1. **Overview Statement:** Briefly summarize the assessment activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating:

A. Program Learning Outcomes Assessed 2008-2009:

- Graduates will demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis.
- Graduates will exhibit skill and competency in applying qualitative and or quantitative methodologies necessary for writing papers in the field of politics.
- Graduates will conceptualize political problems and apply analytical skills to propose solutions to them.
- Graduates will demonstrate willingness and ability to justify political opinions and judgments.

B. All members of the department participated in the assessment of the learning outcomes noted above.

The primary assessment activities undertaken by the Politics department during academic year 2008-2009 were the following:

- Formulation, discussion and revision of Politics Program Mission;
- Formulation, discussion, and revision of Politics Program Learning Goals;
- Formulation, discussion, and revision of Politics Program Learning Outcomes; and
- Assessment of a number of Learning Outcomes related to two of our four Learning Goals.



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2. Please Answers the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:

a. What did you do?

- The department devoted most of our all-day departmental retreat to assessment. First, the department discussed and revised the Program Mission, Learning Goals, and Learning Outcomes drafted by the department chair.
- The department decided to focus most of our assessment activities on our second broad learning goal (Students should develop skills in critical thinking, modes of analysis, research and communication). To that end, we decided to use the Politics Senior Honors Seminar student presentations as an opportunity to assess graduating students' skills in a number of areas, and to test and revise the rubric designed for the presentations.
- In addition, the department chair conducted an informal "exit interview" with the graduating seniors who had been officers of the student-run Politics Society. The exit interview was a wide-ranging conversation designed to elicit students' perceptions of the development of their knowledge and skills, as well as suggestions they had for the Politics program.

b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?

As noted above, one of the primary aims of our assessment of the Politics Senior Honors Seminar presentations was to evaluate the rubric as well as to determine the relative uniformity in professors' evaluations of student presentations. The rubric proved effective, and only minor differences were found amongst professors' evaluations of students' achievements in meeting learning outcomes, as evidenced by their oral presentations.

The faculty was impressed by the student achievements in meeting the learning outcomes. However, it was noted that the students evaluated were the top graduating seniors (and hence not representative) and this year's graduating class in Politics were remarkable (two Valedictorians, one Dean's Medal winner, and a number of students admitted to top graduate programs). Hence, we see the need to broaden our assessment activities in the coming year to include a more representative sample of our students.



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The exit interview proved to be an illuminating indirect measure of student learning, however, once again, it should be noted that the students interviewed were not necessarily representative (the students interviewed were four officers of the Politics Society). They reported that they all, as a result of their education, felt themselves equipped to analyze political phenomenon in a non-biased yet critical manner. They made a number of suggestions (greater consistency across the introductory courses; greater opportunities for faculty and students to use technology to communicate, i.e., blogs) all of which will be discussed by the faculty in the fall.

c. What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?

The Politics Department already has made a number of changes, provoked by our discussions on assessment:

First, the department has decided to make all four “primary” introductory courses required for the major. In the past, students could choose four out of five introductory courses, but as a result of our discussions, we decided that a student should not be able to graduate with a degree in Politics without meeting the learning outcomes noted below:

- a) Graduates will comprehend and apply key concepts from four primary subfields of politics (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Politics and Political Theory); and
- b) Graduates will understand the broad range of political systems and cultural perspectives on politics.

To that end, it was decided that all students should take our four introductory courses.

In addition, we decided that all students, in order to prove competence in the learning outcomes noted above, would have to achieve at least a C (2.0) in all four courses to graduate with a degree in Politics. Hence, we have changed our departmental requirements.

Finally, in discussing how best to meet the learning outcome--“Graduates have designed, implemented and communicated the results of an original research project” --we have begun deliberations on two proposals. One proposal calls for all students to complete one upper-division Politics course in which students are required to write a (12 to 15) page research paper, and the second calls for an additional 1 unit requirement that students must complete, typically in their senior year (that would appear as a Directed Research/Directed Study unit), in which students would do additional work for a course that would show evidence that they met the “research project” learning outcome.



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3. **Attach a copy of the components of the department/program assessment plan that have been modified since its initial submission:**
 - a. Program Mission
 - b. Program Learning Goals
 - c. Program Learning Outcomes
 - d. Program Learning Rubrics aligned with outcomes
 - e. Curriculum map that shows the courses that pertain to the outcome

Please return to: Provost Office by June 1, 2009

You can send your replies as either a Word attachment (to: marin@usfca.edu) or as a hard copy to: Provost Office, Lone Mountain Rossi Wing 4th floor.

If you have any questions, please contact: William Murry, Director of Institutional Assessment (wmurry@usfca.edu or x5486).