

## Politics Department 2020-2021 Assessment

Degrees offered: Major/Minor

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Mission Statement: [no changes since last report]

The Department of Politics faculty fully supports the University Vision, Mission and Values. The Department is committed to teaching political theories and concepts, critical thinking, and modes of analysis and research methods that are fundamental for allowing students to engage with the world as life-long learners. The Department cultivates students' civic skills and competencies, and guides them in developing informed perspectives on, and commitments to, civic responsibility. We seek to help students develop competent means of self-expression, both oral and written, by exposing them to aspects of government institutions and actors, and political relations; that is, to formal institutions and processes and the dynamics of the power and politics that run our system both inside and outside of government structures. Students will be able to demonstrate competence in the primary texts, policy matters, political histories, and analytical frameworks that shape the study of politics in the U.S. and abroad. Our current pedagogical models include traditional lecture-based courses, seminars, academic internships, public forums, and other innovative, democratic, student-centered learning methods. We also provide Service Learning opportunities in the civil society, NGOs, and public service sectors in order to help students gain "real world" experience.

PLOs: [no changes since last report]; see below (#1 = Major; #2 = Minor)

Curricular Map: [no changes since last report]; see below (#1 = Major; #2 = Minor)

	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4	PLO5
Program Learning Outcomes X Courses	Students master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems, and institutions in global, national and local contexts.	Students demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis in written and oral form.	Students design, implement and communicate original research.	Students develop skills in collective deliberation, through collaboration and engaging diverse viewpoints.	Students examine the relationship between the theories and practices of politics through structured service learning opportunities.
Courses or Program Requirement					
Introductory Sequence: POLS 100-110 Introduction to Politics: Ideas and Institutions/Change and Conflict	I	I		I	
Thematic Seminars: two 200-level courses	D	D		D	
Electives: five 300-level courses	M	D		M	
Research Course: one 400-level course	M	M	M		
Politics Internship or Politics Community Engaged Learning: one SL or CEL course in POLS	D			M	M
Key: I=Introductory; D=Developing; M=Mastery					

	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3
POLS Minor Courses X Program Learning Outcomes	Students master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems, and institutions in global, national and local contexts.	Students demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis in written and oral form.	Students develop skills in collective deliberation, through collaboration and engaging diverse viewpoints.
<b>Five Required Courses:</b>			
1. 1 100-level course (POLS 100, Introduction to Politics: Ideas and Institutions or POLS 110: Change and Conflict).	I	I	I
2. 1 200-level course (POLS 2xx)	D	D	D
3. 3 300-level electives (POLS 3xx x 3)	M	D	M
	Key:		
	I = Introductory		
	D = Developing		
	M = Mastery		

**Assessment background and schedule:**

As the initial CAS-wide assessment plan dovetailed with a wholesale curriculum revision of our major and minor, we sought and were granted permission to implement a staged assessment plan that would assess a different component of our new major each year, adding it to previously assessed components until the entire curriculum was under assessment.

As some background on this curriculum: after a multi-year effort, we successfully restructured the Politics major and minor in 2016. We moved definitively away from a traditional, static, “subfield” organization, which both failed to do the complexity of the world around us justice, and was of little relevance to our students and their career trajectories. Now, we offer a “scaffolded” approach that features a clear trajectory of skills and knowledge building throughout students’ college careers, and exposes them to critical issues drawing across areas from theory to economic development.

There are now real distinctions among our 100-, 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses:

- The two required 100-level courses provide introductory, survey material (and both semesters fulfill Core E)
- The two required 200-level courses focus on individual themes (such as urban development, money and politics, or social movements) as a way to further develop analytic skills (both oral and written)

- The five required 300-level elective focus on mastery of various kinds of political analysis through a wide range of elective courses in theory, comparative politics, international relations, and more, which offer students opportunities for deepening their exposure to research.
- The major also requires one Service Learning/Community Engaged Learning in Politics (that also fulfills Core SL/CEL)
- Finally, we require a capstone experience through a 400-level research intensive course.

The structure of our minor follows the scaffolded approach, with 1 100-level course; 1 200-level course; and 3 300-level courses.

For reasons having to do with a former Politics Chair leaving the university, and the interruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, our last full assessment was of AY 2016-2017. Thus, we are re-starting our plan at the point where it was left off, having completed the first assessments of our 400-level and 100-level courses. Thus, in this current report, we offer a continuing assessment of those levels and add to it an initial assessment of 200-level courses.

Our assessment plan going forward is as follows:

- In F22: Assess AY 2021-22: Initial assessment of 300-level electives; continuing assessment of 100, 200, and 400-level courses.
- In F23: Assess AY 2022-23: Initial assessment of SL/CEL courses; continuing assessment of 100, 200, 300, and 400-level courses.
- In F24: Assess AY 2023-24: Initial assessment of 400-level courses; continuing assessment of 100, 200, 300, and SL/CEL courses.

With respect to our next APR, also delayed due to COVID-19, we anticipate it in F22, which would enable us to have at least initial assessments of four of the five components of the major.

## **POLS 2020 Assessment of Intro Sequence (POLS 100-110)/PLOs 1, 2 & 4 @ Introductory Level**

**Jeffrey Paller & James Taylor**

In 2020-21, we implemented the fifth year of our five-year assessment plan, which was designed to assess our new curriculum as we roll it out. Thus, we continued to assess the work done in our year-long gateway sequence, *POLS 100 Introduction to Politics: Ideas and Institutions*. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the class was delivered remotely via Zoom.

This course is designed to fulfill three of our five Program Learning Outcomes at the introductory level. We organize this assessment according to those PLOs, below.

But first, to clarify our forms of assessment. We opted to draw from four types in order to have considerable depth as well as breadth:

- Embedded assignments in the courses – research, writing, and exams
- Student self-reflection opportunities on nearly every major assignment, including pre- and post-reflection (which also allowed us to structure some assignments to capture student level/competence and interests).
- Ongoing instructor observation
- Peer evaluations

Our assessment population was the students who took both classes. These are largely first-year Politics students (the vast majority in their first year at USF).

POLS 100 F20 enrollment: 56

### **PLO 1) Students master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems, and institutions in global, national and local contexts.**

We designed final exams in such a way as to capture student ability to define and critically analyze key concepts and theories, using sections on defining terminology and identifying and explaining central quotations from pivotal texts. They also had the opportunity to write an essay to demonstrate their abilities in critical analysis. We attach exam questions in Appendix 1 below.

Our main assessment was garnered through the grades for the finals. We are very pleased to see the following results, achieved through blind grading of final exams:

POLS 100 F 20 Final Average Score: 87.11

As a comparison, we have remained remarkably consistent with previous year's results:

POLS 100 F 17 Final Average Score: 85.67

POLS 110 S 18 Final Average Score: 87.42

In other words, we have taught students in such a way that they demonstrate high proficiency, exactly where we would expect them to be, on average, at this introductory level. This demonstrates teaching methods that are effective and consistent.

We also assessed this PLO using research and writing assignments. Assignments were focused on analyzing different countries. Every paper required that they use different forms of evidence and document their evidence to support their analysis. Students completed weekly “Check your understanding” reading assignments that helped them stay up-to-date on the reading. This was very helpful in Zoom format.

**PLO 2) Students demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis in written and oral form.**

Our embedded assessment here was done through an examination of one country throughout the entire year. Students engaged with intensive peer feedback on their papers, after which they were given a chance to incorporate the feedback by revising their work. Thus they were able to encapsulate and present opposing viewpoints on globalization and development, criminal justice, social movement success and assert an argument favoring one perspective and support their viewpoint with evidence.

One example of such work can be found in Appendix 1; the paper averages were 87, 78, and 76, showing again that we pitched the assignments exactly where we would hope the students’ achievements to reach. The reason for the decrease was that throughout the semester some students stopped completing assignments, and earned zeros. This demonstrates the challenge of keeping students on track on remote classes, and demonstrates a need for a “stay on track program” at the A&S or University level. It also demonstrates the benefit of in-person class.

**PLO 3) Students develop skills in collective deliberation, through collaboration and engaging diverse viewpoints**

We are proud to say that we offered students opportunities to develop this outcome throughout the year, including an election reflection. More work could have been done to foster a more collaborative environment.

Students posted YouTube videos and reflected on the 2020 election. It gave them a chance to apply political science concepts to a very important political moment in their lives.

One student said the following:

*I believe that the 2020 presidential election says a lot about the state of democracy. Number one, our democracy will be a lot better for the next four years compared to the last four years. Number two, the cases of coronavirus will decrease, hopefully in mid-2021 or by the end of 2021. The country will be back and track especially when the mask law gets enforced.*

*How did you experience the election? I experience the election well, despite the fact that I had to wait a few days for the other states to finish counting the votes but I felt good about it. It was*

*also my first time voting in the General election which is why I was so excited to participate. I am happy that the election turns out the way I wanted it to be. After finding out who was elected, I felt so proud that I was able to take part in an important election and I will never forget it.*

This quote demonstrates the challenges of teaching students with strong opinions; they need to learn to analyze political science concepts without simplifying analysis to which candidates they like or do not like.

Other students highlighted the “worrying state of democracy” in the US and across the world.

Another student said:

*Citizens' participation in voting is a sign of the democratic process as they elect the leaders to represent them, their ideas, and leaders who support the citizens' interests. The current US election has put democracy under the spotlight as polls have suggested that Joe Biden can be announced as the winner. The current results indicate that Trump has suffered rejection from voters. However, with elections results indicating a small fraction of votes separating Biden and Trump, it reveals almost equal and opposite reactions from the Trump's administration.*

*The elections process has shown the state of democracy in the country after Trump, and his legal team had announced that states ad electoral commission should be blocked from their process of counting the votes. The president claimed that there had been irregularities in the counting process. Trump's announcement arose after Biden took the lead in the count. The US as a democratic country, his claims had no impact, and the vote-counting could not stop. In various countries with weak democracy, such an announcement could have stopped the vote counting.*

*Joe Biden has not been announced as the winner, even with the projections indicating that Biden won. Democratic process and institutions displayed democracy despite Trump's claims of irregularities of electoral fraud. Various Trump's supporters and senators of his Republican has ignored his claim. For instance, Republican Senator Toomey of Pennsylvania described the president charges as disturbing to him as he made serious allegations without supporting the claims. Adam Kinzinger, a Republican, could tweet on Trump allegations as 'debunked misinformation' urging him to stop spreading misinformation. Simultaneously, the Republican governor of Maryland, Hogan, claimed that Trump's comments were undermining the democratic process. The Republicans who went against Trump stand on claiming irregularities in the voting were an indication of democracy in the country, forcing Trump's oldest sons to assail Republicans for failing to fight for Trump.*

*How did you experience the election?*

*During this year's presidential elections I experienced it like no other. During the previous 3 elections, I remember never really caring or batting an eyelash at what was going on. I could say that I starting caring about elections this year because I've gotten*

*older and started seeing the reality of the world and how one leader can put so many lives in danger due to not seeing the reality of what is really happening and staying oblivious, just to satisfy the ones in power. To be honest I was not a fan of either the republican or democratic candidate this election but one choice was better than the other. I could also say I was really involved this year even though it was all virtually. This was the first year I became a fellow with the Nevada Democrats which consisted of me calling people to make sure they were going to vote for Biden, if they had voted, and did confirmation calls for people who signed up to volunteer.*

This quote demonstrates how important this election was, and why taking courses on politics directly impacts their lives, and gives them the tools to better understand the world around them.

**What this assessment suggests going forward:** we were lucky enough to be engaged in a team-teaching experience that lasted two years, so some of what we reflected on in the first year we were able to build on in the second. For example, we realized that we can never provide too much structure for group process, or time in class for groups to work together. We also learned the challenges of remote classes, which include making sure that students stay on track over the course of the semester.

**Plans for further closing of the loop:** we will continue to present this assessment for colleagues' feedback, and stay attentive to the feedback from colleagues who teach the next level of coursework in terms of what preparation they find satisfactory or needs further work. And the instructors for next year will repeat this assessment.

## Appendix 1

### Politics 100 Final Exam

**Part I: Define and state the significance** of five terms or concepts. A good answer has a clear one-sentence definition, and a three or four sentence explanation for why the concept is important in the study of politics (10 points for each term. **50%** total).

1. Ideology
2. Imagined communities
3. Black liberation
4. Oligarchy
5. Federalism
6. Proportional representation system

**Part II: Identify** the author and **interpret the meaning** of five passages. A good answer correctly identifies the author and work in the first sentence, and provides a four or five sentence interpretation of the passage. What does the author mean? Why is this passage important to the study of politics? (10 points for each passage. **50%** total).

#### Passages

1. “The value of democracy includes its intrinsic importance in human life, its instrumental role in generating political incentives, and its constructive function in the formation of values (and in understanding the force and feasibility of claims of needs, rights, and duties). These merits are not regional in character. Nor is the advocacy of discipline or order. Heterogeneity of values seems to characterize most, perhaps all, major cultures. The cultural argument does not foreclose, nor indeed deeply constrain, the choices we can make today” (Sen 16).
2. “By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community” (Federalist No. 10).
3. “In very general terms, it appears that women’s movements and activists in societies that have emphasized “equality” over “gender difference” in gender relations have also tended to emphasize diversity and the importance of identity when it comes to racial and ethnic difference as well as other forms of difference. Conversely, women’s movements and activists in societies that have adopted a “difference” frame for understanding gender – understood in the narrow sense of a gender binary – have been more likely to focus on commonalities between various identities, particularly similarities between women of different races and ethnicities” (Tripp 1).
4. “Wise as the Framers were, they were necessarily limited by their profound ignorance” (Dahl Ch. 2).



5. “The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie” (Hannah-Jones).
6. “Apathy, the main symptom of the second phase, was a necessary mechanism of self-defense. Reality dimmed, and all efforts and all emotions were centered on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow. It was typical to hear the prisoners, while they were being herded back to camp from their work sites in the evening, sigh with relief and say, "Well, another day is over” (Frankl).

### Issue Brief 1

**The Assignment:** In 4-6 pages, answer the following:

Do the founding ideologies of your country contribute to democracy? Why or why not?

In this essay, examine the major ideologies that played a role in the formation of your country.

Discuss how they emerge and re-emerge over time. How are the ideologies politicized? Whose interests do they serve? Why do they persist?

Use the following outline:

**Paragraph 1:** Introduce the topic in an interesting way. Most importantly, make an argument for why you think the founding ideologies enable or constrain democracy.

**Paragraph 2:** Discuss the founding of the country. When did it emerge? Why and how? Discuss whether the founding institutions and ideologies put the country on a path toward democracy, or contributed to authoritarianism. Make sure to reference at least one reading from class.

**Paragraph 3:** Discuss one example in your country’s history when ideologies impeded stability. Discuss whose interests were served, and whose were undermined.

**Paragraph 4:** Discuss one example in your country’s history when ideologies enabled stability. Discuss the process through which ideologies shaped political action.

**Paragraph 5:** Assess the state of democracy in your country today. How “democratic” is it? How do the dominant ideologies in the country enable democracy, or threaten its existence? How do ordinary people “experience democracy” in your country? Make sure to reference at least 2 readings from class.

**Paragraph 6:** Conclude your essay. Do more than restate what you already said. Explain why your analysis matters for the study of politics in your country.

**Requirements:**

- 4-6 pages; Times New Roman; 12 point font; one-inch margins

**Due Date:** September 18 by 11:59 pm on Canvas.

- The assignment is worth 15% of your final grade

### Issue Brief 1 Grading Rubric

	Comments	Points
<b>Paragraph 1: Does the essay make a logical argument and have a clear thesis statement?</b>		/15
<b>Paragraph 2: Does the essay explain the</b>		/15

<b>founding ideologies of the country, and why they emerged?</b>		
<b>Paragraph 3: Does the essay provide an example of when ideologies impeded democracy, and explain why?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 4: Does the essay provide an example of when ideologies enabled democracy, and explain how they shape political action?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 5: Does the essay discuss the state of democracy in the country today?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 6: Does the essay have an interesting conclusion?</b>		<b>/10</b>
<b>Does the essay reference at least three class readings?</b>		<b>/15</b>

**/100**

### **Issue Brief 2**

**The Assignment:** In 4-6 pages, answer the following:

Do the government institutions in your country deepen divisions in your country, or contribute to peaceful coexistence?

In this essay, examine the major identity groups in your country. Discuss the important social cleavages, and how political institutions deepen these divisions or ameliorate differences. How are identities politicized?

Use the following outline:

**Paragraph 1:** Introduce the topic in an interesting way. Most importantly, make an argument for why you think the political institutions in your country deepen social cleavages or promote peaceful coexistence.

**Paragraph 2:** Discuss the important social identities and cleavages of the country. Explain how politics and political institutions shape the formation of relevant social identities.

**Paragraph 3:** Discuss one notable minority group in the country. What is their history in the country? Are they oppressed? What rights do they have? What are their demands? What role do political institutions play in their marginalization?

**Paragraph 4:** Discuss the constitution. Is your country a federal or unitary system? Is it presidential or parliamentary? How do the political institutions deepen or ameliorate social cleavages? Do the institutions of governance provide inclusive representation for major groups in society?

**Paragraph 5:** Discuss the most recent national election. How did social identities map onto political competition? What role did minority groups play in the election?

**Paragraph 6:** Conclude your essay. Do more than restate what you already said. Explain why your analysis matters for the study of politics in your country.

**Requirements:**

- 4-6 pages; Times New Roman; 12 point font; one-inch margins
- The paper must incorporate three of the assigned readings from class.

**Due Date:** October 23 on class.

- The assignment is worth 15% of your final grade

**Issue Brief 2 Grading Rubric**

	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Paragraph 1: Does the essay make a logical argument and have a clear thesis statement?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 2: Does the essay discuss the important social cleavages of the country, and explain how political institutions shape the formation of relevant social identities?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 3: Does the essay discuss one notable minority group in the country and explain the roots of their marginalization?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 4: Does the essay discuss the constitution, and explain how it promotes or constrains inclusive representation for major groups in society?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 5: Does the essay discuss the most</b>		<b>/15</b>

recent national election and how social identities map onto political competition?		
Paragraph 6: Does the essay have an interesting conclusion?		/10
Does the essay incorporate three assigned readings in a meaningful way?		/15

/100

### Issue Brief 3

**The Assignment:** In 4-6 pages, answer the following:

What explains your country's place in the world system today?

In this essay, consider the values, political structures, and international relationships that contribute to your country's position in the global system.

Use the following outline:

**Paragraph 1:** Introduce the topic in an interesting way. Explain your country's position in the global system today. Does it hold a position of power in international organizations? Who are its allies? Is it economically dependent on other nations? Most importantly, make an argument for why you think the country holds this position in the global system.

**Paragraph 2:** Discuss the history of state building in your country. Did it experience the process of state formation that Charles Tilly describes? Did it undergo a history of decolonization? Is the color line relevant to its history of becoming a state?

**Paragraph 3:** Is your country a strong or weak state today? Document where your country stands on the Fragile States Index: <https://fundforpeace.org/2019/04/10/fragile-states-index-2019/>. Explain why you think your country is strong or weak, and what contributes to its position.

**Paragraph 4:** Discuss one event in your country's past that strengthened its position in the global system, or weakened it. Explain the legacy of this event for politics in the country.

**Paragraph 5:** Consider the theories of liberal internationalism, realism, and world systems theory. What approach best explains the position of your country in the world today?

**Paragraph 6:** Conclude your essay. Do more than restate what you already said. Explain why your analysis matters for the study of international relations today.

**Requirements:**

- 4-6 pages; Times New Roman; 12 point font; one-inch margins
- The paper must incorporate three of the assigned readings from class.

**Due Date:** December 4. Turn in on Canvas.

- The assignment is worth 15% of your final grade

### Issue Brief 3 Grading Rubric

	Comments	Points
Paragraph 1: Does the essay make a logical		/15

<b>argument and have a clear thesis statement?</b>		
<b>Paragraph 2: Does the essay discuss the history of state building in your country?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 3: Does the essay discuss whether your country is a strong or weak state today, and why?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 4: Does the essay discuss one important event in the country's history that affected its position in the global system? Does it discuss the legacy of this event?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 5: Does the essay discuss which theory of international relations best explains your country's position in the world?</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>Paragraph 6: Does the essay have an interesting conclusion?</b>		<b>/10</b>
<b>Does the essay incorporate three assigned readings in a meaningful way?</b>		<b>/15</b>

**/100**

Upload a five minute video via YouTube (unlisted, but provide link) where you answer the following:

- What does the 2020 presidential election tell us about the state of democracy in the United States?
- How did you experience the election?
- You must reference one reading from the class that you think is relevant.

The assignment is due Tuesday, November 10.

## **POLS 200-level Assessment Memo for 2020-2021**

**Elisabeth Jay Friedman, Kathleen Klaus, Jeffrey Paller**

### **1) Brief introduction of 200-level; which PLOs they are intended to meet; which courses are assessed**

- a. To build from our year-long Introductory course, which provide students with broad knowledge across fields and topics of politics, the 200-level sophomore seminar courses are thematically focused and provide a model for in-depth investigation of issues. They help students move from building objective knowledge to understanding the complexity and subjectivity of political studies and practice. Students are exposed to different ways of thinking about a particular issue: e.g., historically, institutionally, comparatively, theoretically, or statistically. This course level provides the foundation for student achievement in the following, 300-level courses in two ways: First, it provides significant content. Second, students are taught tools for critical analysis and offered opportunities for engaging in research. Consequently, students should begin to understand the connections between the topic of research and modes of investigation; that is, the what and the how.
- b. PLOs for the 200s: “developing” (intermediate level) of the following:  
PLO 1: *Master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems, and institutions in global, national and local contexts*  
PLO 2: *Demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis in written and oral form*  
PLO 3: *Develop skills in collective deliberation, through collaboration and engaging diverse viewpoints*
- c. 200’s assessed: about half of 200s delivered in 2020-2021:
  - i. POLS 240 Youth Politics (Friedman) F20; 16 students
  - ii. POLS 260 Cities, Slums and Democracy (Paller) F20; 21 students
  - iii. POLS 280 Security & Terrorism (Klaus) S21; 14 students
- d. Forms of assessment: We drew from embedded assignments including political autobiographies; robust conceptual and readings quizzes and exams; literature review; politics “explainers; policy briefs; collective teaching, conversations, and debates; and student feedback.

### **2) Assess PLO 1 at “developing” level**

- a. Assessment element & results from POLS 240
  - i. Political auto/biography: at the end of each of the four thematic units, students had the opportunity to *apply* and *assess* what they had read through an analytic reflection on their own or other young people’s political experiences in a short paper. The intention was to enable students to both show their understanding of key concepts from the reading and evaluate them with respect to contemporary youth political engagement around them. We also used these as the basis of class discussion. The average grade from the first to the last entry improved from 90 to 92.5%. Although in general students’ application of insights from the texts

resulted in agreement with them, some more critical analyses resulted in challenging authors' insights. This was clearly a growing edge for students who may still be hesitant to challenge the authority of published works. Group discussion in class was one method for drawing out critical perspectives further.

- b. Assessment element & results from POLS 260
  - i. Students completed two quizzes throughout the semester where they were asked to master political concepts. The quizzes evaluated the following: 2 questions asked to define and explain important political concepts; 2 questions asked to compare and contrast neighborhoods they learned about in the readings and class discussions, and; 2 questions asked students to consider the future of urban development through a discussion of relevant public policies. Students showed significant improvement: they raised scores from an average of 84.86 to 89.95. These quizzes demonstrate that students mastered the material, but also started to critically engage with the scholarship in new ways.
- c. Assessment element & results from POLS 280
  - i. Students completed 3 reading quizzes over the course of the semester. Each quiz contained several short essays. Each essay prompt required students to synthesize and engage critically with several weeks of class material – including lectures, readings, class debates, and films. The quizzes were also designed as a way to encourage students to do the reading, and to learn how to focus on key themes that emerged across readings and lectures – themes that are central to understanding the politics of violence extremism (e.g., “explain the connection between the Vietnam War and the rise of White Power Movement” (quiz 1), “How does the idea of “sacred values” help explain the ways in which people become radicalized?” (quiz 2, “What does it mean to take a psychological approach to the study of terrorism...?” (quiz 3). Students performed consistently well across all three quizzes, with the average on each being around 89%.

### **3) Assess PLO 2 at “developing” level**

- a. Assessment element & results from POLS 240
  - i. Summary of academic conversation: this “classic” literature review assignment asks students to write a final paper critically evaluating the secondary research on an issue of youth politics. Scaffolded across several weeks, preparation included a library orientation, peer review of bibliographic work, and individual meetings with the professor. The average grade for completed papers was 90%, with nearly all students successfully organizing a coherent review of a debate on their chosen topic by comparing and contrasting the distinct perspectives in the literature. Moreover, the movement between rough and final drafts in terms of coherence and argument demonstrated growing analytic proficiency. As an inspiring detail, student tackled critical issues ranging

from impediments to young BIPOC women's leadership to youth voter turnout to gender-affirming healthcare for transgender youth.

- b. Assessment element & results from POLS 260
  - i. As a final assignment, students completed an explainer of a topic relevant to the study of urban politics, and applied it to the city they spent the semester researching. Students completed research on the topic, and outlined a clear research question and argument. Explainers are short posts meant to simplify the main arguments of research findings and clearly state its significance for non-specialists. The explainers are modeled after blog posts at Vox.com, Washington Post's Monkey Cage, or New York Times' The Upshot and can include graphs, tables and maps, as well as text. The final explainer built off scaffolding research assignments throughout the class. Explainer topics included how migrants find housing in Shanghai; the state of Cape Town informal settlements during COVID-19; why urban villages persist in China, and; why housing problems continue in Delhi. This demonstrates the comparative nature of the class, as well as students' ability to address timely public policy challenges.
- c. Assessment element & results from POLS 280
  - i. Two assignments required students to demonstrate their critical thinking skills and develop theses. The first was a policy briefing paper (20% of grade) in which students were asked to imagine that they been hired as an expert on violent extremism to provide a briefing to either the FBI or the CIA. After selecting a particular extremist group or movement, they were asked to write a 5-page memo helping the FBI or CIA understand the following: History and origins of the group, political objectives, logic of violence, role and importance of ideology and individual-level motives, mechanism of recruitment and mobilization, and suggestions for restraining future acts of violence. Students did very well on this assignment, with the class average equaling 92%.
  - ii. The second assignment in line with PLO 2 was the take-home final exam (25 percent of grade). The exam asked students to write an essay on any two themes (i.e. prompts) from a list of six. The instructions specified that a strong essay should specify a clear thesis statement and use specific examples from course materials as the evidentiary basis of the thesis statement. Exam included questions such as the following, "Why do women join terrorist organization such as ISIS?", "What have you learned about the White Power Movement and its use of violence?", "To what extent can ideology, both religious or secular, help explain the use of terrorism?" In responding to these questions, students had to reflect on key concepts from the class and clearly and effectively synthesize these debates. Overall, students did well on this exam, with the class average equaling 88%.

#### **4) Assess PLO 4 at "developing" level**

- a. Assessment element & results from POLS 240



- i. Collaborative Teaching: this final group project has two elements: 1) a presentation that offers the class analytic insight into one overarching youth politics theme by synthesizing several students' individual research along with class materials, accompanied by an engaging media "deliverable"; and 2) an instruction modality beyond the presentation that extends or deepens the class knowledge of or engagement with the group's theme. Each group is responsible for then conducting one class session, integrating the presentation and other teaching modality. The average grade for the four class groups was 93%. All presentations offered well-designed deliverables; the best clearly incorporated course perspectives, with some critically responding to them by drawing on student research. One of the presentations offered syntheses, while the others relied heavily on summaries of individual research outcomes. All of the additional teaching modalities were engaging, several amusing, and helped to push our course learning forward through polls, breakout group discussions, collective notetaking, reflection exercises, and more. The collaborative energies were on clear display, with only one or two students stepping back, rather than up, by relying on their peers' efforts. As a related benefit, this assignment offered the students an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to not only learn, but also teach (collaboratively)!
- b. Assessment element & results from POLS 260
  - i. Students completed two "comparing cities conversations" with classmates throughout the semester. Students were asked to discuss with another classmate how their city is governed, and how they will propose to address challenges with urban growth. In the first conversation, students were prompted with the following: "You have been hired to plan and design housing for your city. In particular, there are one million residents who are in need of housing. Some of these residents have families that have been living in the family for decades, while others are new migrants from other parts of the country and even other countries. You are tasked with providing enough housing for all." Students discussed the challenges they would face, but through deliberation, also learned from the other students some possible solutions. In the second conversation, students were prompted with: "You have been hired as a consultant by another city to share the strengths and weaknesses of urban development of your city. Using your explainer as a guide and your city as a case study, you will explain to your partner what works and what doesn't work with respect to urban development. Based on your research, you should pitch a development project and/or housing policy that you think should be applied to the other city. You will offer suggestions, as well as warnings for the future." Through this conversation, students learned from one another, but also had to consider how far their ideas could generalize--the scope conditions of their proposals. Students excelled on these assignments: Average for conversation I was 96%, and conversation II was 96%.

- c. Assessment element & results from POLS 280
  - i. This class helped students develop collective deliberation skills through daily class discussion and debate. Many of these debates emerged organically through use of the Socratic method. In each class lecture, students were called upon to think through key questions and debates, and take a stand. The class also involved weekly group discussions, which enabled students to discuss challenging questions with one another. Ten percent of student's final grade was based on the quality of their engagement and discussion.

## 5) Student Comments

The readings were a little bit much to handle, but I liked the discussions and topics. I definitely learned a lot and tried **coming up with solutions to the problems in cities and slums!**

Loved this class. Really everything about it, all of the assignments were stimulating and every class **I learned something so new, and from a completely new/different perspective.**

I loved this class! I found each set of readings and lectures so incredibly **interesting and relevant to what is going on in the world today.**

- 6) **General conclusions/observations:** Our collective assessment left us quite pleased at the success we achieved in all PLOs, including fostering reading skills, engaging in entry-level original research; offering comparative insights at local, national, and global scales; articulating research findings for an audience; stimulating engaging interactions; and promoting the investigation of critical social issues focused on social justice and political transformation. We also noted a growing edge with respect to critical engagement with course materials, as well as the need to promote more synthetic analysis of individual research.

- 7) **Plans for closing the loop:** we will present this assessment for colleagues' feedback, and stay attentive to the feedback from colleagues who teach the next level of coursework in terms of what preparation they find satisfactory or needs further work. And the instructors for next year will repeat this assessment.

## **Senior Honors Seminar, Fall 2020 Brian Weiner**

### Brief Notes About this Semester's Cohort:

Twelve students participated in the Fall 2020 Senior Honors course, conducted over zoom due to Covid-19. Of the twelve students who started the course together in the fall,

- all successfully completed the course requirements,
- all presented their thesis projects to the public via zoom, and
- all had their projects published as a part of the department's annual publication.

- all students went on to receive Departmental Honors on the basis of their performance in the Honors course, the major, and the university.
- two students received department prizes for top academic and leadership awards in the major.
- one student was awarded a highly-competitive fellowship (Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellowship).
- two students are currently attending highly-selective graduate programs (Georgetown and University of Southern California).

#### Format for the F2020 Senior Honors Presentations<sup>1</sup>:

In the last week of the semester, as in previous years, students presented their research and findings to the department and the public. The key difference this year was that students presented their research over zoom. Students developed a 15-minute oral presentation summarizing their key findings, research methods, and explaining how they situated their work in larger debates in the literature and the discipline. Then, 15 minutes were devoted to questions and answers from audience members participating over zoom. Those participating included members of the full-time faculty in the department, family of the graduating seniors, and other students including leaders from campus organizations and junior Politics majors who were planning ahead to learn more about the honors seminar in order to apply for admission during the Spring semester. As in a formal academic conference, students used powerpoint presentations.

#### Program Learning Outcomes

The Politics department has established five program learning outcomes, three of which students are expected to gain mastery in by completing a 400-level course. They are:

#1: Students master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems and institutions in global, national and local contexts.

#2: Students demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis in written and oral form.

#3: Students design, implement and communicate original research.

#### F2020 Assessment and Findings:

A number of years ago, the Politics department created a rubric to assess senior theses. The rubric does not match up perfectly with the three program learning outcomes noted above, although there is a great deal of overlap in their focus on critical thinking skills, ability to conceptualize political problems, conduct research, defend opinions and judgments, and more broadly, present a thesis in both oral and written form. As the titles of the students' senior theses suggest, students were encouraged to delve deeply into their topics, hence in many cases their thesis did not necessarily exhibit their competence in mastering Program Learning Outcome 1 (Students master and critically analyze key political concepts, systems and institutions in global,

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A provides the schedule and paper titles of the presentations.

national and local contexts) although they certainly may have mastered this skill throughout their coursework in the department.

The rubric was designed to assess four learning goals and provides three possible outcomes of varying levels of mastery. The learning goals are as follows:

#1: Graduates will develop critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis.

#2: Graduates will develop skill and competency in applying qualitative and quantitative methodologies necessary for writing papers in the field of politics.

#3: Graduates will conceptualize political problems and apply analytical skills to propose solutions to them.

#4: Graduates will demonstrate willingness and ability to justify political opinions and judgments.

Below are the findings from the assessment tool utilized by the department. Only the categories receiving marks by the faculty are presented below. Appendix B provides the rubric used. For assessing the four primary outcomes for the Honors course, faculty utilized the same tool developed and adopted by the Department several years ago to ensure consistency across the years.

**Outcome 1: Graduates will demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis:**

<i># of Tallies</i>	<i>Description</i>
10	Arguments display sound and logical analysis that reveal clear understanding of relevant ideas ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )
10	Work goes well beyond the obvious in constructing interpretations of political phenomenon ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )
3	Thesis is unfocused ( <i>Average Achievement of Outcome/Benchmark Standard</i> )
7	Thesis is clearly written or stated ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )
3	Thesis displays some original ideas, but seems obvious or elementary ( <i>Average Achievement of Outcome/Benchmark Standard</i> )
7	Thesis displays insight and originality ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )

**Outcome 2: Graduates will exhibit skill and competency in applying qualitative and quantitative methodologies necessary for writing papers in the field of politics.**

<i># of Tallies</i>	<i>Description</i>
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- 2 Work displays fairly comprehensive knowledge of research methodologies used to collect and analyze political data. (*Average Achievement of Outcome/Benchmark Standard*)
- 2 Work displays thorough knowledge of research methodologies used to collect and analyze political data. (*Very Good Achievement of Outcome*)
- 7 Research methods were used correctly and effectively to gain as much information from the data as possible.
- 3 Research methods were employed although there were some mistakes in how they were used, and or more information could be gleaned from the data.
- 4 N/A (Note: A number of comments suggested that this outcome should be rethought and reformulated)

**Outcome 3: Graduates will conceptualize political problems and apply analytical skills to propose solutions to them.**

<i># of Tallies</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Political problems are stated and analytic skills employed to devise solutions, but problems and/or solutions are not clear as they might be or the relationship between the two is unclear. ( <i>Average Achievement of Outcome/Benchmark Standard</i> )
7	Political problems are stated clearly and analytic skills employed to logically devise creative solutions with a direct relationship to the problem to be solved. ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )
2	Analytic skills are demonstrated, but are not as logically or fully as they might be. ( <i>Average Achievement of Outcome/Benchmark Standard</i> )
8	Analytic skills are demonstrated fully and logically with a direct relationship to the problem to be solved. ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )

**Outcome 4: Graduates will demonstrate willingness and ability to justify political opinions and judgments.**

<i># of Tallies</i>	<i>Description</i>
10	Demonstrates willingness and ability to thoughtfully analyze and evaluate a wide range of alternative points of view on key political issues. ( <i>Very Good Achievement of Outcome</i> )
7	Justifies positions and explains assumptions with solid evidence.
3	Justifies positions and explains assumptions with some evidence,

### Analysis:

Across all four-outcome categories, not a single tally was marked assessing student work at the lowest achievement level (“Very poor achievement of outcome”). All students achieved average or very good achievement marks across all outcome categories.

**Outcome 1: Critical Thinking/Thesis Formulation.** Across the four components of Outcome 1, most students performed at the “Very Good Achievement” level. The first component of the outcome assesses the capacity of students to articulate logical arguments and according to faculty assessment, all students who received tallies received marks indicating Very Good Achievement of the outcome. The second component of the outcome assesses the capacity of students to construct and articulate interpretations of political phenomenon. Once again, all students who received marks received Very Good Achievement of the outcome tallies. The third component, regarding the quality of the formulation of the thesis statement, three students received Average Achievement and seven received Very Good Achievement. Lastly, the fourth component of the outcome measuring the originality of their thesis, three students received Average marks and seven Very Good tallies.

**Outcome 2: Methodology.** As noted above, a number of faculty marked “Not Applicable” in their responses to this outcome. Students are not required to apply quantitative methodologies in their theses, neither are they required to take a class in research methodologies to graduate. The department has offered two classes (Politics 222, Approaches to Political Research and Politics 395, Politics Lab) recently, and the question of whether to require students to take a “methods course” has been discussed for some time. Amongst the students who did receive tallies for this outcome, two students’ work displayed fairly comprehensive knowledge of methodologies (Average Achievement) and two displayed thorough knowledge (Very Good Achievement). In terms of the application of methods, three students’ work showed Average Achievement and seven showed that their research methods were used correctly and effectively (Very Good Achievement).

**Outcome 3: Conceptual Analysis** showed a very impressive result, with the great majority of students showing a Very Good Achievement in terms of their ability to clearly state a political problem and to employ analytic skills to devise creative solutions to it.

**Outcome 4: Ability to Evaluate and Justify Judgments and Opinions.** Similar to outcome 3, students received high marks in their willingness and ability to analyze a wide range of alternative points of view. Most students also received high marks in their ability to justify their positions and explain their assumptions with solid evidence (7) whereas 3 students received Average marks on this outcome.

**Plans for closing the loop:** Because this course is taught every year, the next instructor will have access to this summary to inform their approach to the senior thesis. As a faculty, we will continue to discern the best way forward with respect to methodological instruction, articulation, and assessment. And the instructor for next year will repeat this assessment.



# POLITICS HONORS THESIS SYMPOSIUM

Please join us for our annual Politics Senior Honors Thesis Symposium! Students from our capstone course will be presenting their research and an engaged audience will make this a special event for all!

## THURS. DEC 3RD

**12:00 Morgan Myers:** Queer International Relations and the Challenge of Nonbinary Sovereignty

**12:30 Jennifer Ayala:** Mexico's Avocado Industry: Rent-Seeking Activities and the Dangers Faced by Small Producers

**1:00 Christian Farquhar:** Past the Point of No Return?: Democratic Backsliding and Authoritarianism in the Trump Era

**1:30 Tomy Monzon:** Puerto Rican Statehood: Lessons from Hawaii

**2:00 John Iosefo:** Beyond the Silence of Guns: An Analysis of Peace and Reconciliation Efforts in Northern Ireland

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## FRI. DEC 4TH

**1:00 Lauren Silva:** The Mexican Narcostate: Defining the Relationship Between Mexico's Two Governing Bodies

**1:30 Madison Owens:** Reforming Responses to Survivors: An Evaluation of San Luis Obispo County's Treatment of Sexual Assault

**2:00 Kate Northington:** Rhetorical Performance: Examining Masculinity in Presidential Campaign Oratory, 2016-2020

**2:30 Aileen Marquez:** Offline Solutions to Online Polarization in the U.S.: Responding to Social Media Tribalism Through Community Building Efforts

**3:00 Amanda Sanchez:** Race-based Citizenship: A Comparative Look at Mexican and Irish Immigrant Experiences in the United States

**3:30 Kylie St.Pierre:** The Future of Genetic Testing and its Impact on Native American Tribal Membership

**4:00 Angelina Polselli:** Virtual Groceries: How the Digital Marketplace has put CalFresh Customers at Risk

**JOIN ANYTIME, BUT \*MUTE\* ON ENTRY!**

Appendix B: Politics Honors Thesis Evaluation Rubric, Fall 2020

Professor: \_\_\_\_\_ Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome	Very Poor Achievement of Outcome	Average Achievement of Outcome [Benchmark Standard]	Very Good Achievement of Outcome	N/A
<p><i>Graduates will demonstrate critical thinking skills and formulate and defend a thesis.</i></p>	<p>Arguments are superficial or illogical, and fail to display clear understanding of relevant issues.</p>	<p>Arguments are generally sound, but there are lapses in logic or understanding.</p>	<p>Arguments display sound and logical analysis that reveal clear understanding of relevant ideas.</p>	
	<p>Work reveals misunderstanding or omission of significant political phenomenon.</p>	<p>Work shows understanding of political phenomenon but lacks depth.</p>	<p>Work goes well beyond the obvious in constructing interpretations of political phenomenon.</p>	
	<p>Thesis is not stated.</p>	<p>Thesis is unfocused.</p>	<p>Thesis is clearly written or stated.</p>	
	<p>Thesis displays few original ideas, and most seem obvious or elementary.</p>	<p>Thesis displays some original ideas, but seems obvious or elementary.</p>	<p>Thesis displays insight and originality.</p>	
<p><i>Graduates will exhibit skill and competency in applying qualitative and or quantitative methodologies necessary for writing papers in</i></p>	<p>Work displays incomplete knowledge of research methodologies used to collect and analyze political data.</p>	<p>Work displays fairly comprehensive knowledge of research methodologies used to collect and analyze political data.</p>	<p>Work displays thorough knowledge of research methodologies used to collect and analyze political data.</p>	



<i>the field of politics.</i>				
	Research methods were employed incorrectly, and little analysis of the data was completed.	Research methods were employed although there were some mistakes in how they were used, and or more information could be gleaned from the data.	Research methods were used correctly and effectively to gain as much information from the data as possible.	
<i>Graduates will conceptualize political problems and apply analytical skills to propose solutions to them.</i>	Political problems and solutions are not stated clearly, and the relationship between the two is unclear or absent.	Political problems are stated and analytic skills employed to devise solutions, but problems and or solutions are not as clear as they might be, or the relationship between the two is unclear.	Political problems are stated clearly and analytic skills employed to logically to devise creative solutions with a direct relationship to the problem to be solved.	
	Analytic skills are not demonstrated, and or serious weaknesses are apparent in logical thinking.	Analytic skills are demonstrated, but are not as logically or fully as they might be.	Analytic skills are demonstrated fully and logically with a direct relationship to the problem to be solved.	

<p><i>Graduates will demonstrate willingness and ability to justify political opinions and judgments.</i></p>	<p> Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view on most political issues.</p>	<p> Demonstrates willingness and basic ability to analyze and evaluate obvious alternative points of view on most key political issues.</p>	<p> Demonstrates willingness and ability to thoughtfully analyze and evaluate a wide range of alternative points of view on key political issues.</p>	
	<p> Fails to justify positions and explain assumptions with evidence.</p>	<p> Justifies positions and explains assumptions with some evidence.</p>	<p> Justifies positions and explains assumptions with solid evidence.</p>	