

POLS 2016-2017 Assessment

In 2016-2017, we implemented the second year of our five-year assessment plan, which was designed to assess our new curriculum as we roll it out.

- Thus, we began by assessing the work done in our new, year-long gateway sequence, *POLS 100 Introduction to Politics: Ideas and Institutions* and *POLS 110 Introduction to Politics: Conflict and Change* with regards to **PLOs 1, 2 & 4** (expected outcome: introduction)
 - pp. 1-38 plus appendices
- We also continued the assessment of our Senior Honors Capstone, *POLS 495 Senior Honors Seminar* with regards to **PLOs 1, 2, 3, & 4** (expected outcome: mastery)
 - pp. 38-45 incl. appendices

POLS 100-110, Assessed by Prof. Elisabeth Jay Friedman and Prof. Keally McBride

As shown in our Curriculum Map, these courses are 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 F16 enrollment: 51

POLS 110 S17 enrollment: 76

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 16 Final Average Score: 85.8
POLS 110 S 17 Final Average Score: 85.0

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.

We also assessed this PLO using research and writing assignments. In the Fall, those assignments were focused on analyzing different countries; in the Spring, the students wrote about a host of vital issues in political development. Every paper required that they use different forms of evidence and document their evidence to support their analysis. In Appendix 1 we also include a sample prompt for their papers, and two examples of student work, one superior and one low-average, to show how these were deployed.

Finally, in the Fall semester they were assigned group projects that asked them to do research and provide analysis of local/USF policy on water usage, within the context of local and state water policy and hydrology. This was a huge success: the final dynamic original research presentations were not only shared with the class, but also with guests including the head of the Sustainability Taskforce at USF and the Head of Facilities Management. The latter was impressed enough to offer the students a budget to design an awareness-raising campaign for USF water use, and the former affirmed student contribution to the ongoing development of a water policy at USF. See Appendix 1.1 & 1.2 for examples of presentation powerpoints.

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 the sequence of papers the students wrote in the Spring semester. Each paper offered a different approach to argumentation (straw man, concession, and student choice about which to deploy) as applied to a vital issue of contemporary political relevance. 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. The final exam essay question for the Spring: “Can the US justice system deliver justice to everyone? Why or why not?” also gave the students a final opportunity to demonstrate their critical thinking skills through formulating and defending a thesis.

One example of such work can be found in Appendix 1; in Appendix 2 below we offer additional examples of the work students did to meet this PLO.

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 the following assignments – in the Fall, a debate over globalization, a Model UN, and the aforementioned Water Policy Project; and in the Spring, a culminating project focused on Social Movement Development & Success (see Appendices 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 3.2 for examples of the result of such collective deliberation).

As an illustration, the Model UN assignment asked students to first collect evidence on their individual country's position; then, in regional groups, develop a common position; and finally, present that regional position to the class. We were able to assess them based on our observation of their deliberation processes, the group outcome, and their own pre- & post-reflections on their learning process.

This activity opened my eyes to how hard it is to represent a country or region in international negotiations because what you are obligated to argue might not be correlated with your individual beliefs. The activity also discouraged me because it seems that most regions only kept in mind the costs and benefits to themselves, not the bigger picture of the issue and the real humanitarian costs at hand.

More student feedback showed further development of collective deliberation. We asked them to evaluate their group process and individual contributions after each culminating effort (the Water Policy Project and Social Movement Project). We asked specific questions about progress, challenges and improvements (“if we had to do this again, we would do this differently...”). Here is a typical sample of comments:

Progress:

Our greatest progress was when we created an organized outline that mapped out our schedule up to our presentation date. We also gathered a lot of research material.

When we decided what movement to use – brainstorming what issues related to our movement and topic was quite engaging.

Challenges:

With picking a topic: initially we wanted to discuss white feminism, moderate feminism, conservative feminism. But we knew that would be too much. So we decided to narrow it and concentrate on one that affects San Francisco women.

Streamlining ideas to make presentation more specific.

Improvements:

Begin to work on our presentation earlier and collaborate more with the “national” group.

Be clearer about our guidelines before we jump into designing our presentation

Spend more time choosing and discussing more topics; less research on a single one.

Individual assessment focused on pride in their work but also reflected honest frustrations with the coordination of the group process. Some students pointed to issues with the equitable distribution of work; others reflected on the difficulties inherent in engaging distinct viewpoints – and representing them fairly. But most spoke about how much they were able to learn from the process about how social movements actually operate.

I enjoyed my second semester in this class and I think my favorite thing about the classes was the group projects. I really feel like I learned more when working on the group projects because I have to apply the skills and knowledge I learned the entire semester. It's also the most enjoyable because I get to learn more about something I've heard of but didn't really know much about.

From this project I learned more about the environmental movement especially the impact it has in the Bay area more than I would have ever learned through experience or on my own. I have never really been interested in the environmental movement but now I feel like I have some sort of responsibility because I want our planet to be inhabitable for future generations.

I grew up in a very small, mainly white community, where I most definitely was sheltered. I always read about bias and injustices on the news, but never really thought about them past that. That's the beautiful thing about USF. I am not only getting a college education; I am also being shown the reality of the world and learning about the hardships I never experienced back at home, that so many people are experiencing. Joining politics as a department and major is one of the best decisions I have ever made. I go back home with a much more open mindset and perspective on the world.

What this assessment suggests going forward: we were lucky enough to be engaged in a team-teaching experience that lasted two semesters, so some of what we reflected on in the first semester we were able to build on in the second. For example, we realized that we needed to be more specific about presentation content for student clarity and instructor evaluation. Thus, we improved our rubrics (see Appendix 4 below for an example of the Social Movement Rubric and Peer Evaluation). Writing this memo also reminded us to collect our assessment data as we generate it, rather than waiting for the end of the year!

Plans for further closing of the loop: we will present this assessment at our faculty meetings 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 we will repeat this assessment next year.

	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					
POLS 100-110 Introduction to Politics: Ideas and Institutions/Change and Conflict	I	I		I	
Two 200-level Courses	D	D		D	
One Major Concentration: the Politics of Transformation; the Politics of Law and Justice; the Politics of Governance	M	D		M	
One 300-level "R" (Research) Designation Course	M	M	M		
One Service Learning Course (Currently POLS 338 Gender & Politics in Comparative Perspective; POLS 396 Public Administration Internship; POLS 397 Fieldwork in Public Interest Organizations)	D			M	M

Key:
I = Introductory
D = Developing
M = Mastery

	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4	PLO5
Institutional Learning Outcomes 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 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.
Institutional Learning Outcomes					
1. Students reflect on and analyze their attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions about diverse communities and cultures and contribute to the common good.	I	D			M
2. Students explain and apply disciplinary concepts, practices, and ethics of their chosen academic discipline in diverse communities.	I	D	M	D	M
3. Students construct, interpret, analyze, and evaluate information and ideas derived from a multitude of sources.	I	D	M		
4. Students communicate effectively in written and oral forms to interact within their personal and professional communities.		D		D	M
5. Students use technology to access and communicate information in their personal and professional lives.	I		D		D
6. Students use multiple methods of inquiry and research processes to answer questions and solve problems.	I		M		D
7. Students describe, analyze, and evaluate global interconnectedness in social, economic, environmental and political systems that shape diverse groups within the San Francisco Bay Area and the world.	X				X

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