Millikin University
Student Learning in the Political Science Major

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Executive Summary

The Department of Political Science supports the mission of the University in preparing students for professional success, democratic citizenship in a global environment, and a personal life of meaning and value. The mission of the department is

experience (PO 371) and professional development course (PO 410), adding practical political and vocational knowledge to the resources with which they can complete their major requirements.

The political science curriculum requires majors to integrate basic and enhanced knowledge of political phenomena, research skills, and the practical experiences gained over the course of the previous three years into a senior thesis project (PO 450). Majors work with faculty members to develop research proposals which they then execute in written form and defend before the department's faculty at the conclusion of their senior year.

Just as the curriculum assists the department in achieving its goals for student learning outcomes and helps students to actualize their plans of study, so too does the advising process. Advising in the department facilitates and integrates reasoned choices that promote the student's growth as a person and as a major. In order to realize this mission, we try to help students:

1.   Develop plans of study for successfully achieving their degree and career goals,
2.   Select courses each semester to progress toward fulfilling their plans of study,
3.   Use the resources and services on campus to assist in fulfilling their plans of study, and
4.

difficulty of the subject matter, etc. (Learning Goals 5 and 6). Each student then makes a formal presentation of their senior thesis to political science majors and faculty members, and we assess the quality of the oral presentation by employing the rubric for the Oral Presentation (see Appendix III) (Learning Goal 7)

Assessment Data

In the department of political science, assessment of goals 1 – 4 involves the administration of pre and post tests in introductory classes (See Appendix II for samples) to gauge student learning over the course of the semester. The department proceeded with initial efforts at collecting assessment data in the spring term of 2008. That process involved eleven students in one section of the introductory American politics course; the department expects to expand its data collection efforts significantly in the next academic year. The instructor of the introductory American politics class administered pre and post tests to students from which the data presented below are derived.

Answering 85 to 100 percent of the instrument's questions correctly qualifies a student for a rating of "excellent"; 64 to 84 percent correct a rating of "adequate;" and below 63 percent correct a rating of "nominal." The department employed the following assessment criteria to evaluate student progress in achieving learning goals:

"Green light" (an acceptable level or clearly heading in the right direction and not requiring any immediate change in course of action): 80% or more of the students ranked "adequate" or "excellent";

"Yellow light" (not an acceptable level; either improving, but not as quickly as desired or declining slightly. Strategies and approaches should be reviewed and appropriate adjustments taken to reach an acceptable level or desired rate of improvement): 60% to 80% of the students ranked "adequate" or "excellent"; and

"Red light" (our current status or direction of change is unacceptable. Immediate, high priority actions should be taken to address this area): fewer than 60% of the students ranked "adequate" or "excellent".

Table 1

Learning Goal 2: Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to American politics

American Politics	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean Correct Answers	6.55	10.27
Nominal (0 – 63 % Correct)	100%	18.2%
Adequate (64 – 84% Correct)	0%	81.8%
Excellent (85 – 100% Correct)		

Analysis of Assessment Results

As can be seen in the table, a significant portion of students improved their performance on the instrument measuring student learning in the spring 2008 American politics course. Every student scored higher on the post test, and improvement ranged from 1 to 8 correct answers. Indeed, a few students demonstrated striking improvement by doubling – and in one case, tripling – the number of correct answers.

While this is an encouraging start for assessment of student learning in the department of political science, the current data cannot provide a basis on which to discern a trend in the quality of student learning. One section's results do not a trend make. As the department continues the process of collecting data over the next year or two, a trend will likely emerge. Additionally, the small number of students sampled makes discerning a trend difficult. Over, time, data from multiple sections of the department's introductory courses should provide a much better picture of the quality of student learning in political science courses.

Given that the department has only recently adopted an assessment plan and begun collecting data, we cannot make any year-to-year comparisons at this time. We will report those trends as assessment data accumulates over time.

Improvement Plans

The department of political science remains committed to providing a quality learning experience for its majors and those students who take its courses in the MPSL, but we cannot yet draw conclusions from assessment data. The department will closely monitor its teaching practices, collect assessment data, and – as the collection of more extensive data indicates – address areas in need of improvement.

1. Professional success
2. Democratic citizenship in a global environment
3. A personal life of meaning and value

Department Goals
1.   Identify key questions, fundamental concepts, and theoretical frameworks critical to an understanding of the political world;
2.   Identify the fundamental concepts,

Appendix

7. Shifts by large numbers of voters in their support from one party to another that endure over time are better known as
    A. dealignments.
    B. reapportionments.
    C. realignments.
    D. redistrictings.

8. A single-member, plurality district electoral system
    A. benefits parties that finish second in individual races.
    B. encourages the emergence of a two-party system.
    C. gives each party legislative seats in proportion to the number of votes it receives.
    D. means that legislators are elected by the public at large.

9. The situation of one political party controlling the White House while the other controls the Congress is better known as
    A. divided government.
    B. an ineffective government.
    C. weak-party government.
    D. a coalition government.

10. The processes laid out in the U.S. Constitution tend to favor
    A. the Congress.
    B. the *status quo.*
    C. those who want change.
    D. the president.

11. Voter turnout is HIGHEST among which of the following?
    A. People with strong party identifications.
    B. People with weak party identifications.
    C. People with no party identification   independents.
    D. None of the above. Strength of partisanship is not related to turnout.

12. Which of the following is an example of *de facto* segregation?
    A. Laws designed to limit minority participation in the political process.
    B. More restrictive immigration laws.
    C. White flight to the suburbs to avoid the integration of city schools.
    D. Government policies that place burdens on minority-owned businesses.

13. The MAIN provision of the Connecticut (or Great) Compromise at the Constitutional Convention
    A. created a bicameral legislature which resolved the issue of representation.
    B. established the Electoral College which resolved the dispute over who should elect the president.
    C. guaranteed that Connecticut would always negotiate government conflicts.
    D. established a federal system which resolved the power dispute between states and the national government..

14. Interest groups find it EASIEST to achieve their policy goals when they

b. All states need security, but rarely invest enough in it
c. When states attempt to increase their security, they make others feel less secure
d. Without a strong state like the U.S., there will be insecurity in the international system

6. Realism is a "state centric" theory.   T   F

7. Economic liberalism has largely defined the existing international economic environment.   T   F

8. Dependency theory argu0.1 35-9(c)-15(y)2[(e)[(e94(y)20(53f4y1 0 0 1p   )] TJETre)-5-reyintayintP3(t

Appendix III: Evaluation Rubrics for Senior Thesis

Thesis Proposal: Assessed

Oral Presentation: Assessed by Department Faculty.

	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal
Organization	**[5 points]** Presentation communicates the work's central idea in a clear organizational pattern.	**[3 points]** Exhibits some connections between major points and the work's central idea but may be disorganized at points.	**[1 point]** Confused, jumbled, disorganized presentation.

Millikin University
Department of Political Science
Student Learning Evaluation

Written Thesis

Student name:
Date of evaluation:
Evaluation by: Department Faculty
Faculty name:

Item	Criteria			Student Score
	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal	
Literature Review (Goal 1)	**[6 points]** Presents a well-organized review of pertinent political science literature. Demonstrates clearly how previous findings relate to the project at hand. Builds toward a clear hypothesis.	**[4 points]** Review of pertinent political science literature present; however, connections to current project tenuous or – in a few cases – absent.	**[2 points]** Superficial to no connection of project to pertinent political science literature.	
Analysis (Goal 5)	**[5 points]** Makes clear connections between findings in the data and established knowledge in the field. Demonstrates superior mastery of the material. Suggests – and explores – areas for possible future research.	**[3 points]** Connections between findings and established knowledge present, but analysis fails to make some of them clearly. Demonstrates ample mastery of the material. Only suggests – without much elaboration – future avenues of research.	**[1 point]** Few to no connections between established knowledge in the field and the project's findings. Questionable mastery of the material.	
Clarity (Goal 7)	**[3 points]** Very few grammatical errors, if any. Sentences clearly express ideas, and paragraphs are coherent wholes. Overall structure is logical and coherent and contributes to overall strength of proposal.	**[1 points]** Common errors in usage and sentence structure. Sentences and paragraphs may run too long or too short. Varied coherence of paragraphs and clarity of logic.	**[0 points]** Many spelling and grammar errors, use of incomplete sentences, inadequate proof reading.	
Total Points (14 max.)				

Millikin University
Department of Political Science
Student Learning Evaluation

Oral Presentation of Thesis

Student name:
Date of evaluation:
Evaluation by: Department Faculty
Faculty name:

Item	Criteria			Student Score
	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal	
Organization	**[5 points]** Presentation communicates the work's central idea in a clear organizational pattern	**[3 points]** Exhibits some connections between major points and the work's central idea but may be disorganized at points.	**[1 point]** Confused, jumbled, disorganized presentation.	