Assessment Plan

B.A. in Political Science
School of Social Sciences
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Kean University

Mission:

The Political Science Program seeks to provide a quality education to prepare students for graduate school, for employment in the public or private sector, and for the demands of enlightened citizenship. Students in the program will be able to discern the nature of political relationships based on an understanding of political structures, organizations, and constitutions, and be able to examine the relationship between underlying theoretical principles and their practical political ramifications. They also will be able to demonstrate an understanding of both the traditional and contemporary approaches to the discipline. They will be able to distinguish the importance of political leadership and the obligations assumed by a politically informed citizenry within a democratic society. Students will also be exposed to the workings of the American political system and the underlying philosophical commitments that provide for its foundations.

Assessment Process:

Political Science students must take 5 core courses, including the capstone, as part of the requirements for the major. These five core courses provide a solid foundation within the discipline and its various sub-fields. As such, these 5 core courses are the primary vehicle for assessing the knowledge of our students. Beyond the 5 core courses, students take 6 other Political Science courses selected from a list of electives, and it is likely that few majors take exactly the same grouping of 6 elective courses. Therefore, the assessment process will focus primarily on the core requirements within Political Science.

Each core course has assessment tools such as exams, research, analytical and critical writing assignments, group work, etc., as part of the evaluation process and the Political Science program has used results of assessment for making improvements to program practices aimed at increasing student learning. For example, in PS 2100 – American Government and Politics, SLO 6 states that students will “explain and assess the workings of the American political system and describe the underlying philosophical commitments that provides for its foundations.” In Spring 2012, the PS program focused on the latter part of SLO 6 (i.e. describe the underlying philosophical commitments that provide for its foundations”) and developed the following essay, which was asked in two sections of PS 2100.

“Bessette and Pitney argue that “Americans still define the purposes of government in light of the goals articulated in the Declaration [of Independence]” (pp. 10-11). Discuss in detail the goals of government articulated in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration’s contemporary significance. Provide at least one example of the way in which the Declaration informs contemporary debate on an important public issue.”

In summer I, 2012, the faculty teaching PS 2100 found that there needed to be a refinement of SLO 6 to reflect the more practical orientation of PS 2100, a refinement of direct measurement tools (i.e. essay
questions) across PS 2100 sections to reflect commonalities among those sections of the course, a refinement of a rubric specific to PS 2100 to measure student learning in that course.

SLO 6 was modified to read: “Explain and assess the theory and practice of the American constitution and how contemporary American politics reflects continuing debate on these theories and practices”, The measurement tools and course rubric will be modified over Summer 2012 and Fall 2012.

The core course PS 2100 satisfied the following GE SLOs and program SLOs: GE K3/SLO 1, GES 1/SLO 6, and GEV 1, 3/SLO 5.

Another Core course, PS 2400, Introduction to International Relations, was also assessed looking at student learning outcomes and how they align with GE Student Learning Outcomes. For example, SLO 3 states that students will be asked to explain and access the extent to which political positions might be influenced by various factors. The first examination given in every section of PS 2400 requires students to: compare the assumptions, realists, liberals, Marxists, and constructivists made about the principal sources of conflict in world politics. In asking this question, the relevant instructors are attempting to measure student abilities in relation to Political Science Program SLO 3 and GE SLOs GE K2, GE K3, GEV 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

To follow is the Capstone course PS 4130, Senior Seminar in Political Science Assessment Summary:

**Capstone Course (or other core course) Assessment Summary**

*List SLOs being assessed* (as stated on the syllabus)

*(Please indicate the relevant KU SLOs aligned with program SLOs)*

**SLO1:** Students will be able to compare/contrast the nature of political relationships based on an understanding of political structures, organizations, and constitutions.

(KU 2, 3) (GE K2, S1, S3, S4, S5)

**SLO2:** Describe the relationship between underlying theoretical principles and their practical political ramifications.

(KU 1, 4) (GE K2, S1, S3, S4)

**SLO3:** Identify the extent to which political positions might be influenced by factors such as world view, cultural differences, race, class, ideologies, and gender.

(KU 1, 3) (GE K2, S2, S1, S3, S4, S5)

**SLO4:** Analyze the nature of international and comparative political relationships.

(KU 1, 4) (GE K3, S1, S2, S5)

**SLO5:** Describe importance of and discuss the role that political leadership plays and the obligations assumed by a politically informed citizenry within a democratic society.
**SLO 6:** Explain the workings of the American political system and describe the underlying philosophical commitments that provide for its foundations. (To be modified. See above)

Describe method(s) of assessment of those outcomes (attach example of rubrics, assignments exams as appropriate)

*Method of assessment included class presentation, class participation, written paper, decision-making paper assignment, and oral presentation(s). Copy of the syllabus is attached as well as the written/oral assignment project(s).*

Summarize the data that you collected (attach data and/or simple charts or graphs could be included)

The summary of the data collected from the students in the Capstone course for Spring 2012 is attached.

**Main conclusions**

*What have you discovered about student learning? Please indicate positive findings as well as areas for improvement.*

The students appear to be completing their studies with very commendable comprehension of the material, at both its theoretical and practical levels. Students assessed have mastered the techniques of thinking like political scientists, as well as asking questions as political scientists. They comprehend alternative methodologies, styles, and methods of data collection. As a group, the students are able to express themselves articulately in written and oral fashion. The assessed majors recognize the value of the Political Science discipline and its various sub-fields and, with refinement of the assessment mechanism might achieve even higher goals.

**Recommendations for improvements**

*What improvements do you recommend?*

Students should be encouraged to do more writing throughout the curriculum, at both the introductory and advanced levels.

For the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012, students performed better in oral presentations than written research paper. This leads us to conclude that our program needs to continuously emphasize written research skills.

Students should be encouraged to rehearse with their peers so that all students have equal responsibility in each other’s presentations.
Implementations

*What changes did you make or do you plan on making? When do you plan on making them?*

*How do you plan on implementing the changes?*

We might need to modify some of our SLOs in light of data collected in both the Capstone course and the Kean Graduating Senior Survey. These potential changes will continue as our program evaluates our ongoing assessment efforts.

*What resources do you need to make these changes?*

Filling faculty lines with full time faculty will enhance faculty presence and assessment efforts.

Beginning Fall 2012, the culminating assignment done in the Capstone Course, has been identified as a direct measure for assessing attainment of our program Student Learning Outcomes. In this course, assessment data is collected from an assignment that requires students to provide the evidence of meeting program goals. Each semester, composite data from scored student assignments will be collected and analyzed to address areas of program strengths and weaknesses and to inform our decisions ultimately resulting in program improvements. In addition, a systematic process for gathering data utilizing an indirect measure, the Graduating Student Survey, was established. Data from the student survey will also help inform our decisions regarding program improvements to increase student learning. These methods will be used for assessing other core courses. The survey will be administered to the entire class in order to obtain more precise information about meeting students’ needs.

---

**Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) – as aligned with KU SLOs derived from the Institutional Mission* and GE SLOs. ** (Data from Direct and Indirect Measures collected each semester in the Capstone Course or a designated, end-of-program course.)

**Students who graduate with a B.A in Political Science should be able to:**

**SLO1:** Students will be able to compare/contrast the nature of political relationships based on an understanding of political structures, organizations, and constitutions.  
(KU 2, 3) (GE K2, S1, S3, S4, S5)

**Direct Measure:** PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  **Indirect Measure:** Graduating Student Survey
SLO2: Examine and evaluate the relationship between underlying theoretical principles and their practical political ramifications.  
(KU 1, 4) (GE K2, S1, S3, S4)

Direct Measure: PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  Indirect Measure: Graduating Student Survey

SLO3: Identify and assess the extent to which political positions might be influenced by factors such as world view, cultural differences, race, class, ideologies, and gender.  
(KU 1, 3) (GE K2, S2, S1, S3, S4, S5)

Direct Measure: PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  Indirect Measure: Graduating Student Survey

SLO4: Analyze and appraise the nature of international and comparative political relationships.  
(KU 1, 4) (GE K3, S1, S2, S5)

Direct Measure: PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  Indirect Measure: Graduating Student Survey

SLO5: Identify and evaluate the important role that political leadership plays and the obligations assumed by a politically informed citizenry within a democratic society.

Direct Measure: PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  Indirect Measure: Graduating Student Survey

SLO6: Explain and assess the theories and practices of the American constitution and how contemporary American politics reflects continuing debate over these same theories and practices.  

Direct Measure: PS4130: Research paper scored with rubric to demonstrate achievement of program goals.  Indirect Measure: Graduating Student Survey

* KU Student Outcomes: Kean University graduates should be able to: 
1. Think critically, creatively and globally;  
2. Adapt to changing social, economic, and technological environments;  
3. Serve as active and contributing members of their communities; and  
4. Advance their knowledge in the traditional disciplines (GE) and enhance their skills in professional areas (Prof. pgms)

**General Education Student Learning Outcomes 
  Student Learning Outcomes – Knowledge: Students will demonstrate proficiency in knowledge and content by:
  (K1) applying the scientific method to understand natural concepts and processes;
(K2) evaluating major theories and concepts in social sciences;
(K3) relating historical references to literature; and
(K4) evaluating major theories and concepts in the fine arts.

Student Learning Outcomes – Skills: Students will demonstrate the skills necessary to:

- (S1) write to communicate and clarify learning;
- (S2) communicate effectively through speech;
- (S3) solve problems using quantitative reasoning;
- (S4) think critically about concepts in multiple disciplines; and
- (S5) show information literacy.

Student Learning Outcomes – Values: Students will exhibit a set of values that demonstrates:

1) Personal responsibility (GEV1)
2) Ethical and social responsibility (GEV2)
3) Social and civic engagement (GEV3)
4) Respect for diverse cultures and perspectives (GEV4)
5) Life-long learning (GEV5)