POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

ASSESSMENT REPORT

2013
Assessment

In June, 2012, the political science department was asked, for the first time, to assess our majors in 2012-2013 as a part of our departmental self-study. The following report describes the steps that have been taken to accomplish this task, as well as the results of the initial assessment. Because of the deadlines involved, the assessment focusses on the fall semester of 2012. The format of the report (including specific numbered headings) follows the general guidelines developed by the Provost’s Office and distributed to the departments in 2011.¹

1. Assessment Coordinator

In June, 2012, the chair of the political science department appointed David Jones to be the department’s Assessment Coordinator. Professor Jones is a tenured, full professor, who has been a member of the department since 1999. He teaches methodology, and is a member of the department’s executive committee.

2. Learning Goals

Learning goals for majors were originally drafted by the department as a part of a larger learning goals effort in 2009.² In the fall semester of 2012, the department reviewed the learning goals for majors in light of the assessment mandate. It was noted that the detailed format of the original list made it highly impractical to conduct a thorough assessment of learning goals. As a result, the original list was restructured with an eye towards stating goals in as measurable ways as possible. These revised goals for majors were unanimously agreed to in the department’s

¹ “Guidelines for Departmental Assessments of Student Learning within Programs.”
² See “WSAS Major and Tier III Minor Learning Goals”:
executive committee meeting on October 4, 2012. There are a total of eight goals, grouped into five categories, as follows:

By the time that students have completed the major, they will be able to:

**Political Science Concepts**

1) Gain a broad exposure to central issues of political science, which include:

   (a) the ethical problems attendant to the exercise of power;

   (b) the history of important political ideas, such as "liberty," "justice," "community," and "equality";

   (c) the impact of historical, economic, and social forces on the operation of politics;

   (d) the functioning and distinctive features of the US political system;

   (e) the diversity of political systems found among nations and the significance of these differences;

   (f) the interaction among international actors and the causes of war and peace.

2) Apply a key concept, theory, or method of political science to analyze a political question.

**Critical Thinking Skills**

3) Articulate a thesis regarding a political question.

4) Consider alternative perspectives regarding a political question.

5) Evaluate evidence regarding a political question.

**Research Skills**

6) Gather appropriate evidence pertinent to a political question.

**Written and Oral Expression**
7) Craft a well-structured written or oral argument regarding a political question.

*Civic Engagement*

8) Develop a greater sense of civic duty to participate in public affairs.

These eight learning goals were subsequently disseminated to all full-time and part-time faculty, and were posted on the department website. All faculty were encouraged to incorporate the goals into their courses where appropriate.

3. **Relationship of Curriculum to Learning Goals**

As a part of the assessment process, the department reviewed its curriculum to help ascertain the degree to which its course offerings helped students achieve the learning goals. First, the Assessment Coordinator collected at least one sample syllabus for every political science course in the course catalog that had been taught within the past five years. For each course, he then reviewed the description in the catalog along with the sample syllabi. Aware that different instructors may teach a given course in different ways, the Coordinator used his judgment to produce a rough mapping of the relationship between each course and each element of the learning goals. The resulting curriculum map is provided in Appendix A1.

Happily, the mapping exercise confirms that for each of the learning goals for majors, the department regularly offers several different courses that are well-suited to helping students achieve that goal. This observation is helpful for planning allocation of departmental resources going forward.

4. **Assessment**

The department is committed to conducting an assessment at least once every five years, beginning with the 2012-2013 academic year. Given the differing nature of some of the
department’s learning goals, we determined that not all of them could practically be assessed using a single method. As a result, we decided to employ a different method for goals 1 and 8 than for goals 2-7. Details on the procedures and results for each are provided below.

Goal 1 (exposure to central issues)

Procedure:

In advance of assessment, the department set a minimum expectation that at least two-thirds of majors should be able to gain exposure to five or more of the six central issues of political science listed in the learning goals.

To measure exposure, the Coordinator first obtained a list of the department’s majors. After the last date to drop courses in the fall semester, he contacted the Director of Scheduling, Registration, Enrollment, and Data Management in the WSAS Dean’s Office to obtain a spreadsheet identifying each current political science major (declared and undeclared), including their name, Baruch ID code, advancement to degree (e.g., upper senior, lower senior, etc.), GPA, and transfer status. The Coordinator then created a subset of this spreadsheet, consisting of only upper senior majors (23 students). Using these students’ ID codes and the SIMS/BOSS database, the department secretary printed out the entire transcript of each of these upper senior majors.

In the spreadsheet of majors, the Coordinator created a series of new column variables for each course the department offers. Using the data from the transcripts, he entered the code “1” in every box representing a course taken by each student, and “0” otherwise. As a part of the curriculum-mapping exercise described above in section 3, each course had already been coded based on the types of political science issues it covers (see columns 1a through 1f in Appendix A1). Using an algorithm he wrote for use in SPSS statistical software, the Coordinator applied
the “issues” portion of the curriculum map to the spreadsheet data on student coursework. The resulting data provides a summary of the core concepts each student gained exposure to, based on his or her coursework.  

Results:

Table 1: Assessment Results, Goal 1 (exposure to central issues)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal</th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a) exposure to the ethical problems attendant to the exercise of power</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b) exposure to the history of important political ideas, such as &quot;liberty,&quot; &quot;justice,&quot; &quot;community,&quot; and &quot;equality&quot;</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c) exposure to the impact of historical, economic, and social forces on the operation of politics</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d) exposure to the functioning and distinctive features of the US political system</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1e) exposure to the diversity of political systems found among nations and the significance of these differences</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1f) exposure to the interaction among international actors and the causes of war and peace</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of 6 out of 6 issues</strong></td>
<td><strong>74%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of 5 or more issues</strong></td>
<td><strong>96%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of 4 or more issues</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: number of cases is 23.

Table 1 displays the results of the assessment of goal 1 in 2012-2013. According to the data, majors were most likely to gain exposure to issues involving the ethics of political power (1a), contextual forces in politics (1c), and the functioning of U.S. politics (1d). Every single major took courses covering each these issues. Students were also highly likely to gain exposure to issues regarding international relations (1f, 96%) and the diversity of political systems (1e, 91%). Finally, majors were least likely to gain exposure to issues surrounding the history of

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3 The assessment was restricted to students who were not transfers (since transfers would not necessarily have done their political science coursework in our department) and who were on track to fulfill our major requirements by the end of the fall semester (it is possible to have enough credits to be classified as an upper senior, without actually completing one’s major).
political ideas (1b), but even here the figures are impressively high, with 83% taking coursework in this area. Overall, students clearly exceeded the departmental standard. Fully 96% of students (all but one) gained exposure to five or more of the six core concepts. In fact, nearly three-quarters of students gained exposure to all six core concepts.

These results help to validate an important, longstanding decision that we have made as a department regarding the structure of our major requirements. Specifically, rather than mandating a long list of required courses, our program gives students significant flexibility in selecting courses.\textsuperscript{4} We are pleased these results show that even as our majors enjoy tremendous discretion, they are nevertheless ultimately able to gain broad exposure to core issues across the political science discipline.

**Goals 2-7 (concept application, critical thinking, research, expression)**

**Procedure:**

In consultation with faculty, the Coordinator decided to use student papers, embedded as regular class assignments across the curriculum, for the purposes of an assessment instrument. A rubric was designed to be applied to a random sample of twenty such papers, with specific point values designated for each level of achievement (see Appendix A2). This rubric was unanimously approved by the department’s executive committee on October 4, 2012. In advance of assessment, the department set a minimum expectation that the average achievement score on each learning goal should meet or exceed the rubric’s baseline standard set for that goal.

To obtain a collection of papers for potential use as assessment instruments, the Coordinator requested that all faculty (full time and adjunct) assigning papers in their classes

\textsuperscript{4} See: http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/ugradprograms/pol.htm#Major
during the fall semester forward a complete set of student papers from one such assignment to
the Coordinator, along with the exact description of the assignment as given to students. At the
end of the semester, the Coordinator collected these papers and compiled a list of every student
with at least one paper included.

To select the specific twenty papers for assessment, the Coordinator began by narrowing
the complete list of current majors (obtained as a part of the assessment of goal 1) to those with
junior or senior status.\(^5\) Cross-checking this list against the list of collected papers, the
Coordinator identified which junior and senior majors had papers that were able to be assessed.
Each of these student names was printed on its own slip of paper, with no student represented
more than once. All slips were collected in a bin and 20 slips (names) were randomly selected. In
this random sample of students, if a given student had papers from more than one course, the
coordinator selected his/her work from only one of the courses, with an eye to ensuring the
widest possible variation of courses in the overall sample.\(^6\)

To score the papers, two experienced readers were hired from outside the department.
Both were ABDs in political science who had taught multiple undergraduate political science
courses. Working separately, they each applied the department’s rubric to all twenty papers.\(^7\) In
addition, they were each asked to submit a written statement reflecting their qualitative
impressions of the papers as a whole, as well as an evaluation of the process. To minimize
measurement error, the Coordinator averaged together the independent scores from each reader

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\(^5\) While there are some declared majors among sophomores and freshman, we would not expect their limited
experience with the department to necessarily have affected them yet. Just as with goal 1, and for similar reasons,
transfer students are excluded from the analysis.

\(^6\) This procedure minimizes the possibility that student learning will be assessed within only one or few particular
subfields, while still maintaining randomization in the selection of students.

\(^7\) All names were removed from the papers and replaced with ID codes to guard against any potential bias.
to produce a single score for each student on each goal. Each student also received a summary score averaging together all six learning goal scores. Quantitative results were then analyzed with the assistance of SPSS statistical software.\(^8\)

**Results:**

![Figure 1: Assessment Results, Goals 2-7](image)

*Note: 1 = does not meet standard; 2 = meets standard; 3 = exceeds standard. Circles represent the average student score for that category, based on the sample (N=20). Error bars display the 95% confidence interval around that sample average.*

Figure 1 displays results from the assessment of performance on learning goals 2-7. The vertical line down the center of the figure represents the standard set by the department for each learning goal. For each learning goal (as well as for the overall combined average), there is a

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\(^8\) As a test of both the instruments and coding as valid measures of student achievement, the Coordinator compared student’s summary scores to their overall GPA. As expected, the two measures are significantly correlated (\(r=.40, p<.04\) one-tailed).
circle representing the average score for that goal and an error bar representing the 95% confidence interval around that average. The goals are arranged by their average student score (not by goal number): goals with the best student performance are at the top of the figure, and those with lesser performance are below. The bottom category represents the overall average score across all six goals.

On most goals, students met or exceeded department standards. In terms of relative performance, two of the top strengths of the department and its majors relate to the learning goals of applying key political science concepts (goal 2) and gathering appropriate evidence (goal 5). In both cases, the average student score was significantly greater than the departmental standard, with less than a one-in-one-thousand probability of differences this large occurring by chance alone. The strong showing in these two areas are particularly encouraging to the department, given that the former represents the substance of our discipline and the latter represents a research skill that is central to empirically-grounded social sciences.

Two other learning goals also received average scores higher than the departmental standard, albeit not significantly so. These are the goals related to evaluating evidence (goal 5) and crafting a well-structured written argument (goal 7).

Student performance on the two remaining learning goals appears somewhat less encouraging, and thus worthy of more in-depth analysis. First, while the average student performance on the goal of considering alternative perspectives was below the departmental standard, the size of the difference does not meet traditional levels of statistical significance. In other words, it is possible that this poor result is simply an artifact of random sampling error. Nevertheless, given the importance of this goal to the department, we intend to be proactive and
seriously consider whether steps should be taken to bolster student achievement in this area.

Second, average student performance on the goal of articulating a clear thesis was below the departmental standard, and in this case, the difference was found to be statistically significant (p<.045). Comments by the readers suggested that systematic differences in the assignments may have played a role in depressing these scores. Specifically, two assignments included in the sample of papers instructed students to address several discrete questions, rather than one broad question. Following up, the Coordinator found that all five students who completed one of these two assignments were rated as having a substandard thesis by both readers—despite meeting or exceeding the departmental standard on other goals (including written expression). It is possible that these students were actually capable of articulating a thesis, but were simply not asked to do so as a part of these two assignments. If these “hybrid-question” assignments are excluded from the sample and only traditional papers are used as assessment instruments, the average student score is no longer significantly below the departmental standard. Measurement concerns notwithstanding, the department should also focus on improving student achievement on this learning goal.

Finally, while the difference does not reach traditional levels of statistical significance, the average student score on the summary measure of student achievement across all six learning goals is above the departmental standard.

**Goal 8 (civic duty)**

Goal 8 is unique in that it involves a determination of our majors’ level of political participation in their life outside the campus setting. The department determined that trying to measure individuals’ civic participation levels through a survey may offend the privacy of
students. As a result, we offer only an impressionistic assessment of that goal. Specifically, we calculate the percentage of upper senior majors who have voluntarily chosen, at some point during their study, to participate in our internship program. The department’s internship program helps place students in active, unpaid roles in government and other public affairs-related positions. We consider “choosing an internship” to be a very stringent measure of this goal, although many students who do not intern will nevertheless exercise civic mindedness in other ways and at other times that we cannot observe.

In fall, 2012, we find that more than one-third (35%) of our upper-senior majors have participated in our internship program.

5. Departmental Discussion

The results of the assessment will be distributed among the faculty in the form of this report. As a department, we will consider whether the results warrant pedagogical adjustments, and if so, what form they should take. Since such discussions are only at the beginning stage at this point, this section merely provides the Assessment Coordinator’s summary view of what issues may deserve the department’s particular attention.

First, the results of the assessment show that the department is already doing a very good job fostering student learning, in terms of substantive political science content. The results for goal 1 suggest that majors in our program do gain broad exposure to the central issues in political science, and the results for goal 2 show that our majors clearly perform best on the goal of applying key concepts to answer political questions. While these positive results are not unexpected, given our own prior qualitative observations of our majors, we are pleased to find that quantitative evidence supports our anecdotal impressions.

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9 This was done using essentially the same methodology described for assessment of goal 1.
Second, the results point to two learning goals in particular that may merit departmental attention going forward. Relative student performance appeared somewhat less impressive for the goals of considering alternative perspectives and of articulating a thesis. What adjustments might help promote improvement in these areas? One of our readers noted that particular writing assignments emphasize particular skills: some assignments may hone research and evidence-collecting skills, others may lend themselves more readily to thesis and argumentation. The department may consider encouraging faculty to employ more assignments designed to promote the latter skills.

As we plan for the future, there is good reason to believe that subsequent assessments will, indeed, show improvement. This has been the department’s first formal experience with assessment. Now, for the first time, we have a systematic means for members of the faculty to see how we as a group are performing, and respond with suggestions for how we may continue to improve.

6. Reflections on the Process

In general, the procedures used in the assessment process seemed to work well. However, a few issues merit additional comment by the Coordinator and consideration by the department. One important procedural issue that arose was whether “hybrid-question” writing assignments are appropriate as an assessment instrument. It seems to make little sense to rate students’ abilities on a task they were not asked to perform. On the other hand, we need to consider whether ruling out whole classes of writing assignments unreasonably limits the population of students that can be sampled.

On a more pragmatic level, the paper collection task proved to be somewhat unwieldy for the Assessment Coordinator and could stand some improvement. Two particular paper-
submission methods proved the simplest from the perspective of the Coordinator: either uploading students’ papers to Google Docs, or compiling all the papers together in a single zip file. In the future, perhaps faculty who are unfamiliar with these methods may be given some instruction, so that a standard paper-submission format may be employed. Additionally, in the future faculty should require students to submit an electronic version of their paper with their last name as the beginning of the file name. This would help the Coordinator to more quickly and easily locate and keep track of papers written by specific students.

Regarding the assessment of goal 8 (civic duty), one idea that was raised during a review of the process was that the department might consider starting a database of graduated majors. The database would attempt keep track of their career paths after they leave Baruch. This would require that we ask majors to provide us with a non-Baruch email that we could use to contact them after graduation. The department secretary could send out a mass email once a year to update their contact information and current job and educational status. This information would permit the department to gain a greater sense of how well we are preparing our majors for careers. This process might also provide a suitable method of assessing civic engagement, by allowing us to identify students who pursue public service-related careers.

Finally, the assessment process proved to be very demanding upon the time of the Assessment Coordinator. While some of this burden is attributable to “start-up costs,” it is not possible to simply automate the process for future iterations (nor should it be). Instead, considerable effort will continue to be needed at each stage in the process (obtaining, maintaining, and cross-referencing student lists and transcripts; soliciting, collecting, and sorting papers from the entire faculty; hiring readers, blinding, copying and distributing papers;
compiling and analyzing results, and so forth). Given these demands on the time of the Coordinator, it is doubtful the department could find someone to take on this responsibility for future assessments without the promise of reassigned time in each iteration.
## Appendix A1: Curriculum Map

| Learning Goals                                                                 | POL 1101 | POL 2001 | POL 2240 | POL 2260 | POL 2321 | POL 2332 | POL 2353 | POL 3005 | POL 3008 | POL 3086 | POL 3101 | POL 3102 | POL 3103 | POL 3104 | POL 3201 | POL 3310 | POL 3311 | POL 3312 | POL 3313 | POL 3314 | POL 3315 | POL 3316 | POL 3317 | POL 3323 | POL 3333 | POL 3335 | POL 3336 | POL 3337 | POL 3342 | POL 3345 | POL 3347 | POL 3362 | POL 3364 | POL 3365 | POL 3422 | POL 3500 | POL 5452 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1a) exposure to the ethical problems attendant to the exercise of power;       | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         |          |
| 1b) exposure to the history of important political ideas, such as "liberty,"  |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| "justice," "community," and "equality";                                      |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| 1c) exposure to the impact of historical, economic, and social forces on the  |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| operation of politics;                                                        |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| 1d) exposure to the functioning and distinctive features of the US political  |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| system;                                                                      |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| 1e) exposure to the diversity of political systems found among nations and the |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| significance of these differences;                                            |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| 1f) exposure to the interaction among international actors and the causes of  |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| war and peace.                                                               |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |          |

Note: Courses from the catalog that are not regularly taught by Political Science faculty do not appear on this list.
### Appendix A2: Assessment Rubric, Goals 2-7

**Reader A**  
**Student #_____**

*Reader instructions: For each of the learning goals listed here (numbered 2-7), please circle which one of the three levels of achievement best characterizes this example of the student’s work.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal*</th>
<th>Does not meet standard</th>
<th>Meets standard</th>
<th>Exceeds standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Science Concepts:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apply a key concept, theory, or method of political science to analyze a political question.</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of the key concept, theory, or method for this assignment</td>
<td>Basic understanding of the key concept, theory, or method for this assignment</td>
<td>Clear understanding of the key concept, theory, or method for this assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking Skills:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Articulate a thesis regarding a political question.</td>
<td>No thesis or unclear thesis</td>
<td>Thesis is identified and clearly stated</td>
<td>Central thesis as well as subsidiary or underlying aspects of the thesis are identified and clearly stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Consider alternative perspectives regarding a political question.</td>
<td>Does not acknowledge alternative perspectives</td>
<td>Acknowledges alternative perspectives, but not in great depth</td>
<td>Gives serious consideration to alternative perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluate evidence regarding a political question.</td>
<td>Little or no reference to evidence</td>
<td>Evidence is evaluated, but not in great depth</td>
<td>Evidence is carefully and thoughtfully evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Skills:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gather appropriate evidence in pertinent to a political question.</td>
<td>No evidence or evidence irrelevant to question</td>
<td>Student has gathered evidence that has some relevance to question</td>
<td>Student has gathered extensive evidence that directly bears on the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Expression:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Craft a well-structured written or oral argument regarding a political question.</td>
<td>Argument is unstructured; paragraphs are unfocussed</td>
<td>Argument is structured, including an introduction, distinguishable points, and a conclusion; most paragraphs are focused</td>
<td>Argument is clearly structured; each paragraph is focused and organized around a central theme; clear introduction and conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers to the left of each goal refer to their location in the master list of learning goals.

**Scoring the rubric:** Does not meet standard = 1; Meets standard = 2; Exceeds standard = 3.