

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Political Science
Academic Year: 2022-23
Date of Submission: 9-15-23
Department Chair: Tom Knecht

I. Response to the previous year PRC’s recommendations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item: Are there parts of the department curriculum conversations that you can still have since Dr. Covington is on campus? 	<p>Response: Dr. Covington is full time with the Augustinian program and is Vice Chair of the Faculty. Unfortunately, this is not the time for deep discussions about curriculum.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item: How will you determine if a new assignment method such as a podcast would more effectively prepare students in critical training? 	<p>Response. We think this is a great question and we made this the focus of this year’s assessment.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item: It seems that the students’ weakness here is analysis. Is there some other place in our curriculum where students learn research methods? 	<p>Response: It depends on the class and the professor. Prof. Knecht also discusses methodology in many (but not all) of his substantive courses.</p>
<p>Item:</p>	<p>Response:</p>
<p>Notes:</p>	

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.

Program Learning Outcome	<p>Competence in written communication. Assessing this PLO is out of our typical assessment sequence. However, we moved it to this year up for several reasons. First, we wanted to assess a new writing/research assignment for our students. Second, we are responding to the PRC's recommendation from last year to think about how to assess creative assignments. Finally, we do not have great data to assess our Serving Society PLO, which we will assess next year.</p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	<p>Tom Knecht/Kate Bryant</p>
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	<p>Rubric/Assessment of Student Webpages.</p>
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	
Major Findings	<p>In previous assessment reports, the Political Science Department has mentioned our interest in moving away from the traditional research paper model and toward something more creative and more reflective of the type of writing/research students are likely to do in the future. The Department is also aware that many of our students feel ill equipped to compete in today's job market. Therefore, we created a new writing/research assignment designed to engage students and better prepare them for life outside the academia.</p> <p>In Spring Semester 2023, Prof. Knecht required his POL 111 students to write five website posts on American foreign policy (www.westmontforeignaffairs.com). We used Squarespace as our platform. Students wrote to a smart but general audience, which meant no academic jargon or boring prose. Students were also required to learn a new technology (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, SQL, Tableau, etc.) to incorporate into the posts.</p> <p>This project had several goals. First, we wanted this project to be interesting. Prior to the semester, we read an article that argued the key to student success is students' willingness to learn. To this end, we created an engaging assignment that gave students the freedom to research and write on their interests and to learn a technology that they wanted to learn. Second, we want students to learn some hard skills to put on their resume. All students learned Squarespace—one of the most popular website building and hosting platforms. Moreover, they learned a new technology (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, R, Tableau, etc.) that might them land a job and advance in their future careers. Finally, we wanted the students to have a writing portfolio they could show to potential employers or graduate schools.</p>

	<p>We evaluated 14 students on their fifth and final blog post along three criteria: 1. Content and Writing, 2. Style and Creativity, 3. Use of Technology (see Rubric). Scores ranged from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Our goal was that students would average four or better across all criteria.</p> <p>Overall, we are pleased with student scores. The 14 students averaged 3.6 on Content and Writing; 3.8 on Style and Creativity; and 3.6 on the Use of Technology. If we excluded two low-performing students, our scores average 3.8; 4.0; and 4.0.</p> <p>It is hard to compare this year's assessment to past since the rubrics are different. Nevertheless, students seemed to perform much better on this assignment than past.</p>
Closing the Loop Activities	We are still in conversation about the types of writing our students do, especially with AI in the picture. The traditional research paper is still valuable, especially for our students going to graduate school. However, for those not going to graduate school, it makes sense to train them in the type of writing they might be doing. All of this is to say that our writing assignments will be an ongoing conversation within the Department.
Collaboration and Communication	

or/and

II B. Key Questions

Key Question	
Who is in Charge/Involved?	
Direct Assessment Methods	
Indirect Assessment Methods	

Major Findings	
Recommendations	
Collaboration and Communication	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	
Who was involved in implementation?	
What was decided or addressed?	
How were the recommendations implemented?	
Collaboration and Communication	

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	
Who is in Charge /Involved?	
Major Findings	
Action	
Collaboration and Communication	

V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

VI. Appendices

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional)