

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
Graduate Studies Committee
Department of Political Science
University of North Texas
November 5, 2003**

Assessment of Learning Outcomes (Fall 2003)

.....
Academic Program: MA, MS and Phd in Political Science

Graduate or Undergraduate: Graduate

Date: November 19, 2003

Coordinator of Program: Steven Forde

Email: forde@unt.edu

Person completing this form: James Meernik

Email: meernik@unt.edu
.....

Statement of Student Learning Outcomes

Provide a list of the learning outcomes that students are expected to demonstrate that they know and/or are able to perform at the end of their program.

List of learning outcomes that the students are expected to demonstrate that the completion of the program:

- Knowledge of the current and relevant research literature and substance of political science.
- Knowledge of predominant research methodologies and research skills used in the social sciences.
- Ability to conduct original research in political science.
- Design and administration of undergraduate courses in political science.
- Knowledge of the expectations of professional conduct in political science and presentation of research as part of a scholarly community.

Measuring Student Learning Outcomes

Describe how the program measures how well the students have learned the outcomes listed above and provide a list of methods and/or tools with the following information:

- 1. name of assessment method or tool*
- 2. if the method/tool is a national, regional, etc. test or assessment, provide the name of the company who "owns" the tool.*
- 3. frequency of use (how often is the tool / method used)*

The Department of Political Science uses a wide range of methods to assess and measure

student learning outcomes for its graduate program. Below we list the methods of assessment that are used to measure student outcomes.

Methods of assessment

Screening examination: At the end of the first year of course work, students' performances in the program are reviewed by the Graduate Studies Committee. Students who are not doing adequately in course work are provided feedback or asked to leave the program.

Degree plan meetings: After passage of the screening examination, students may form their degree committee. The degree committee works with the student to plan a course of study to prepare them for future course work, examinations, and thesis writing.

Annual committee meetings: Students meet annually with their degree plan committee (later their thesis committee) to get feedback on their degree progress, and set a schedule for completion of the degree.

Research Practicum: In the semester before they take written comprehensive examinations, students are required to take a research practicum.

Written Comprehensive Exams: Students are required to sit for examinations in three main fields in political science. They are able to gain an exemption from their third, non-major field if they earn grades of "A" in all courses in that field.

Oral Comprehensive Exams: After completing written comprehensive examinations, students then must pass an oral examination by their degree committee.

Prospectus Defense: Students are required to submit a proposal for their dissertation. This prospectus is then defended before their committee to ensure that they begin a successful dissertation topic.

Final Dissertation Defense: At the completion of writing the dissertation, students stand for an oral examination of the thesis that is open to the entire graduate faculty.

Professionalization course: Students are required to complete a professionalization course that covers basic information about preparing graduate students for their career in graduate school and beyond. This course covers topics such as conducting dissertation research, preparing for the job market, presenting research papers in professional conferences, strategies for getting tenure, etc.

Classroom Observations and Evaluations of Teaching Fellows: Graduate teaching fellows are observed in the classroom each semester and given feedback on their teaching and instruction each semester they teach their own independent sections.

Placement of Graduates: Recent doctoral and masters program graduates have been

placed in colleges and universities both in the US and abroad, private foundations, and federal government agencies. Examples include University of Texas at Dallas, University of Evansville, SUNY- Stony Brook, Collin County Community College, California State University at San Bernardino, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fu Hsing Kang College (Taiwan), Silla University (Korea), Wayne State University, University of Sheffield (United Kingdom), University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), Liberty Fund, and US State Department. Some graduates of the MA/MS program continue their doctoral degree work at top graduate departments in the US and abroad such as Penn State University, Rice University, Texas A&M University, University of Essex (United Kingdom), University of Konstanz (Germany).

Knowledge of literature and substance of political science

1. Students take a written comprehensive examination at the end of their third year or start of their fourth year.
2. Ongoing coursework and performance are evaluated in annual committee meetings with students.
3. Oral examinations are administered after the comprehensive exams.

Knowledge of predominant research methodologies and research skills used in the social science

1. Screening Examination is conducted at the end of a student's first year in the program.
2. Research Practicum is completed by the end of the fourth year of study, prior to the dissertation.
3. Prospectus Defense is conducted before the dissertation is begun, and requires the student to outline a research project and plan for its completion.
4. Final Dissertation Defense is the culmination of the student's dissertation research.

Ability to conduct original research in political science

1. Research Practicum demonstrates the ability to begin and complete a research project.
2. Prospectus Defense requires the student to outline a research project and plan for its completion.
3. Final Dissertation Defense demonstrates the student's ability to complete and defend a major research project.
4. Placement of Graduates. Recent doctoral and masters program graduates have been placed in colleges and universities both in the US and abroad, private foundations, and federal government agencies. Examples include University of Texas at Dallas, University of Evansville, SUNY- Stony Brook, Collin County Community College, California State University at San Bernardino, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fu Hsing Kang College (Taiwan), Silla University (Korea), Wayne State University, University of Sheffield (United Kingdom), University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), Liberty Fund, and US State Department. Some graduates of the MA/MS program continue their doctoral degree work at top graduate departments in the US and abroad such as Penn State University, Rice University, Texas A&M University, University of Essex (United Kingdom), University of Konstanz (Germany).

Design and administration of undergraduate courses in political science

1. Professionalization course provides students with information about how to design, and administer courses and perform as an effective instructor.
2. Classroom Observations and Evaluations of Teaching Fellows occurs each semester a teaching fellow is in the classroom and provides them with feedback about their teaching performance.

Knowledge of the expectations of professional conduct in political science and presentation of research as part of a scholarly community

1. Oral Comprehensive Exams ensure students have a base of knowledge.
2. Prospectus Defense ensures that students have a solid foundation in formulating research topics.
3. Final Dissertation Defense ensures that a student can summarize and present research in a professional setting.
4. Professionalization course transmits norms of the profession to students.
5. Classroom Observations and Evaluations of Teaching Fellows prepare them to be effective teachers.
6. Placement of Graduates. Recent doctoral and masters program graduates have been placed in colleges and universities both in the US and abroad, private foundations, and federal government agencies. Examples include University of Texas at Dallas, University of Evansville, SUNY- Stony Brook, Collin County Community College, California State University at San Bernardino, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fu Hsing Kang College (Taiwan), Silla University (Korea), Wayne State University, University of Sheffield (United Kingdom), University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), Liberty Fund, and US State Department. Some graduates of the MA/MS program continue their doctoral degree work at top graduate departments in the US and abroad such as Penn State University, Rice University, Texas A&M University, University of Essex (United Kingdom), University of Konstanz (Germany).

Use of Assessment Results

Describe how the results of the assessments described above are shared with the faculty in the academic program? How are the results used to improve the program?

How are the assessment results shared with faculty?

1. Graduate Studies committee is responsible for sharing cumulative evaluations with full faculty.
2. Graduate studies committee meets monthly to address assessment results.
3. Fields meet to discuss course curriculum changes annually.
4. Fields meet each semester to assess student performance on written comprehensive exams.
5. Full faculty are presented with decisions about funding and assessment annually.

How are results used to improve the program?

Screening examinations are now handled by the Graduate Studies Committee instead of individual student's degree committee.

Comprehensive exam schedule has been extended from one week to six weeks to better measure student performance and knowledge of fields of political science. Instead of taking three exams in one week, students now take three exams over six weeks.

Research practicum has been added to evaluate student's ability to conduct original research before entering the dissertation stage. This practicum replaces an earlier research methodology examination that was required of all students prior to taking comprehensive examinations. The previous methodology exam did not assess research skills, while the practicum assesses applied research skills.

Emphasis on research design has been added to all graduate courses:

1. Students are required to complete a course in the Scope and Methods of research in political science.
2. Research design in each of the major subfields is a major component of the fields' proseminars.
3. Methodology courses have been organized into a sequence that builds a set of research skills during the first two to three years in the program.

Emphasis on research skills (as assessed via the practicum and other methods) has resulted in

1. Faster completion of course work
2. Earlier completion of comprehensive examinations
3. Lower teaching burdens on graduate students
4. Encouragement of students to present paper in departmental seminars
5. Increases in the number of students presenting papers in national and regional conferences
6. Department now assists students with the expenses of attending national and regional conferences

Results of Use of Assessment of Results

Describe how the program has changed (or why it has not changed) based on the results of the assessment of learning outcomes. Please indicate how the learning outcomes changed if applicable. Indicate the year the change was implemented.

- Written examination scheduling has been changed in the last 2 years. We now administer three comprehensive exams to each student over a five week period instead of three exams in a one week period. Exam quality has improved.
- Master's degree students only complete course work in one major and one minor field, instead of two minor fields. Students now achieve more specialization in these fields.
- An exemption rule has been devised for doctoral written exams. Students who

earn a 3.75 GPA and above in a minor field can be exempted from that one minor field exam. This has improved the quality of advanced seminars.

- Screening committee evaluations (by the faculty graduate studies committee) provide timely advising and advice to students about their progress in the program and ability to do graduate level research in political science.
- Rationalizing the political methodology courses has allowed us to develop a more coherent sequence of courses. The result is that we have been able to more consistently offer students advanced training in game theory and statistical methods used in political science.