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**PLSCBA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN  
AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2016-17**  
ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN WITH REPORTED OUTCOMES

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## **B.A. in Political Science**

### *Departmental Goals for the BA program*

**PLSC prepares its students to develop:**

- ✓ **a thorough understanding of selected topics in domestic or international affairs**
- ✓ **a comprehension of diversity politics and policy**
- ✓ **an understanding of appropriate methodologies to study issues and topics associated with political science**
- ✓ **a thorough career oriented skill set**

The B.A. in Political Science is a 39 hour four-year program. Currently, the department offers regular courses in three subfields: American Politics; Comparative Politics/International Relations; and Public Administration/Policy. Students with interest in international relations or comparative politics are advised to take a foreign language course to satisfy the requirements of the major. Students are encouraged to seek out complementary majors or minors to round out their education (examples are majors in International Studies, Economics, or Communications or minors in Legal Studies, or Southern Studies. In addition, PLSC is an active participant in the Fulbright College Honors Studies program.

At the end of their studies students should be able to:

- (1) understand the linkage between political, social, and economic issues, with special attention to diversity;
- (2) apply that knowledge to the analysis of real world domestic and international political problems;
- (3) write, analyze and communicate in a professionally competent manner;
- (4) grasp the role of institutions and organizations in the shaping of politics in both domestic and international settings.

### **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

Departmental faculty evaluate these educational goals by:

- offering students assignments that advance the goals noted above
- designing meaningful assessments appropriate to the various sub-fields of the discipline
- supporting students through internships, study abroad and other experiential assignments
- requiring a high quality senior writing assignment by which students demonstrate their written and analytical capabilities and which is reviewed critically by a faculty member
- engaging students in individual research projects around student interests (where appropriate)
- supporting students with diverse or international backgrounds to find suitable mentors

The following provide examples of processes used to determine student competency aligned with those departmental goals.

Goal 1 may be evaluated by faculty in the following ways: (1) administering essay exams that assess students' ability to articulate links between political, economic or social issues, (2) employing assigned readings and examples, and (3) assigning substantial research papers by which students demonstrate their ability to recognize linkages and appreciate the complexity of finding political or policy solutions.

Goal 2 may be evaluated by engaging in internship programs for course credit.

Another way the department assesses students' knowledge in that regard is by encouraging them to participate in study abroad programs and provide written assessments of their experiences.

Goal 3 is assessed by establishing clear expectations of the level of writing and analysis required for a specific class. Students may be required to repeat an assignment if the expected quality is not achieved. Many classes require that students give oral presentations or individuals/groups give PowerPoint presentations.

Goal 4 is most readily assessed when students participate in internships, or other experiential assignments that bring them in contact with institutions and organizations that they analyzed in their class readings. Another way some faculty assess students' understanding is by offering simulations, for example, the US Congress or the domestic politics of a foreign country. These require students to apply their knowledge to a specific real—world setting.

**A Report is annually submitted to the Dean of the college and contains the following:**

- Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
- Any changes to degree/certificate planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis.
- Any changes to the assessment process made or planned.

#### **Results of Assessment of Level of Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes**

Ultimately one of the critical indicators of retention and graduation are the data collected by the Office of Institutional Research (<https://oir.uark.edu/students/retention-graduation.php>)

Results of the assessment of the achievement level in specific program learning outcomes by students *close to the end of their degree program* involves the following products or processes:

**Senior writing assignment:** through the completion of an acceptable senior writing requirement (or honors essay) students demonstrate their ability to write and analyze political issues, construct a well-designed argument using appropriate academic literature, and communicate in a professional

manner. The department continuously reviews its senior writing assignment policy, resulting in policy revisions in 2010 and again in 2014). See:

<http://fulbright.uark.edu/departments/political-science/undergraduate-studies/plsc-swr-guidelines.pdf>

**Regular advising:** Currently departmental advisors are working with students on an “on-need” basis as all advising requirements have been assumed by Fulbright College advising. A separate advisor has been assigned to the legal studies minor and the departmental Honors students, with the assigned honors advisor trained by a staff member in the Fulbright College Honors program. The department also utilizes an undergraduate advisor who engages students in extracurricular activities through Pi Sigma Alpha, which is the national honor society for Political Science.

**Team teaching:** The department supports the development of interdisciplinary courses that can be team-taught. The department has offered a team-taught course in Southern Studies for the last 2 years. This course is taught with faculty from English and History. We anticipate more collaborative courses in the area of International Relations.

**On-line teaching:** PLSC offers sections of the American National Government class and Intro to Legal Studies on-line during both semesters and in the summer. The department is developing online courses to expand its offerings in political communications courses.

**Executive in Residence:** This program is designed to expose students to various career opportunities and provide them with a sense of career progression. The department hosts, when possible, a senior manager in various public service careers each year (Kay Goss 2013; Dean Kruthoff, city management-2014; Suze Francois-international focus 2015; Ray Gosack, city management 2016).

**Intersessions:** Since the initial offering in May 2013, the department has offered a limited number of such classes. These include PLSC 400V The Politics on Film PLSC 400V Campaign Finance and the 2016 Presidential Election; PLSC 3253 The Politics of the Middle East. The intersessions provided an opportunity to not only offer catalog-listed courses but to offer new and relevant courses that students have recently expressed an interest in.

**Internships:** to foster professional development of our students, the department strongly encourages students to pursue internships in offices of elected officials, government agencies or nonprofit organizations. To receive credit, students in these internships must meet specified academic requirements. Our students also participate on a regular basis in the Washington Center internship programs as well as other opportunities on our campus or in internships across the country. We have developed a formal internship document to insure consistent use across different faculty and internship placements.

**Exit surveys:** We no longer conduct an exit survey of graduating seniors. The response rate was not sufficiently large enough to allow for a generalized assessment of the quality of our undergraduate program. We are currently utilizing the “Career Outcomes Report” conducted by the Student Affairs Career Development Center. Due to low participation rates in the department’s survey we felt this survey was a better option. The response rate among students in the 2016 Career survey from Fulbright College was 85%.

**Job placement:** The Career Outcomes Report does provide us with an understanding of the careers students go into and their average potential income. A significant number of PLSC students who responded to that survey are in graduate school, law school or employed in various sectors. However, we are working to develop a successful mechanism to track as many of our alums and their job placements. We are also strengthening our relationship with the Alumni Association. Starting in July 2017 we will send out a quarterly alumni newsletter and access the alumni database to survey alums.

## **Analysis of Results**

### Assessment of barriers to timely graduation

According to OIR six year graduation rates for departmental students in the most current cohort reported was 77.60%. To address impediments to graduation the department will review its course offerings and the feasibility of increasing the number of students allowed to enroll per class. The department currently has in place an undergraduate coordinator who assists with advising during summer orientation. Increasing the coordinator's opportunity to engage with at risk students is currently being looked into.

### Assessment of career readiness

Student participation in internships; study abroad; service learning; programs with specific career tracks can advance their preparation for the workforce.. A continuing challenge is relating to majors career and educational opportunities that align with a political science degree.

## **Changes to Degree Program Made or Planned on the Basis of Results**

The results of this assessment indicate that the program learning outcomes are by and large achieved through continuous improvements of departmental processes.

[Is there a need to or purpose in this sentence? I wonder about it.]

The department hired a new International Relations faculty member who began teaching in the fall 2016. As part of this plan we have also been given approval for additional lecturers to teach introductory classes in international relations and comparative politics. The department also has a clinical faculty, VAP and two lecturers who assist in covering the large service courses. Both the clinical faculty and VAP also teach upper level courses that are in high demand such as Campaign and Elections and Public Policy.

The department has made significant commitments to:

### Improving graduation rates by

- Increased communications to students about the senior writing assignment (a graduation requirement); and streamlining requirements (linked on our departmental website)
- Increased engagement between the undergraduate coordinator and Fulbright Advising Center. The coordinator participates in College retention meetings, orientation and registration of new students and advises the department's honor society.

- Attempting to determine why students may be leaving PLSC before graduating. This is an ongoing effort where the department is working with the Office of Graduation and Retention and undergraduate advisors

#### Improving career readiness by

- Strengthening our curricular offerings that emphasize diversity. New courses in Latino Politics have been added to the curriculum. These courses, in addition to our courses in Southern Studies and African American politics, expose students to a broader narrative about inclusion and politics. The courses which focus on international relations and comparative politics also play a role in this regard.
- Increasing professional development (securing high quality internships; the introduction of an Executive-in-Residence; revitalization of Pi Sigma Alpha in 2014, the departmental honors society and the Prelaw Society and Mock Trial; supporting students interested in attending academic conferences or participating in faculty research, etc.
- Improving internship preparation (streamlined admission and reporting process) and increasing participation in internships by raising student awareness of their availability and value.
- Collaborating closely with the UA Employer Relations Office to alert students of career fairs and other career opportunities. An assessment of these efforts is ongoing.
- Adding an additional section of the undergraduate methods class (PLSC 3603) so that we can teach the class in both Fall and Spring semesters. The addition of a second section during the academic year, which we were able to do in 2015-16, will improve our students' exposure to data analysis skills.
- In the absence of a Teaching and Research lab, the department invested in our departmental library to provide research space for our students and faculty members who collaborate with them. The department acquired 10 iPads and laptops.
- Encouraging students to apply for study abroad (we have seen an increase in numbers of students planning to take advantage of these opportunities). However, there continues to be barriers such as the lack of funding for lower-income students. A new study-abroad fund for political science undergraduates was endowed at 50K to help address this issue in future years. The first recipient was awarded in 2017.
- Encouraging faculty to develop experiential learning/service learning projects as more students have expressed interest in such options (but the department has not yet developed a systematic process to either link students to such experiences or identify resources)—This is part of an ongoing effort with several classes beginning to incorporate these elements; The next step is for the department to develop better assessment tools to determine the impact of such efforts.
- Continuing to develop the *Executive-in-Residence* program to provide students opportunities to interact with experienced administrative and policy practitioners and to help them envision career trajectories with a degree in political science.