



JUNE 19, 2018

**PLSCMA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN  
AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2017-18**  
ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN WITH REPORTED OUTCOMES

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## M.A. in Political Science

### M.A. Program Goals

The M.A. in Political Science is a 36 hour, two-year, program. In addition, the Department also offers a dual degree program with the UA Law School that focuses on international affairs and law. Currently, the department offers regular courses among three subfields: American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations. The Department is presently reviewing the curriculum for the M.A. degree. Right now the core courses include three research methods seminars, at least one class in the area of American Politics and one class in either Comparative Politics or International Relations. The aim is to facilitate discourse across the subfields in political science. Finally, all students must either (1) complete six hours of thesis credit and defend the thesis, or (2) pass a written comprehensive examination.

At the end of their program, students should be able to:

- (1) demonstrate a general knowledge about trends in the discipline of political science, including epistemological diversity when studying complex issues;
- (2) demonstrate the ability to apply that knowledge to specific policy or political contexts by using qualitative and quantitative data;
- (3) demonstrate an understanding of global trends in areas such as governance and political economy, as well as complex policy issues involving, gender, race and ethnicity;
- (4) demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research and communicate the results effectively in both oral and written form.

### Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Departmental faculty evaluate these educational goals by:

- Assessing students' performance on an array of assignments such as extensive writing assignments, presentations and exams.
- Providing a rigorous assessment of students' work performed in internships and other experiential assignments, preferably by seeking feedback from clients with whom they interned.
- Having students demonstrate their writing and analytical capabilities through the successful completion of a thesis, research/conference paper or a comprehensive examination that is reviewed critically by a committee of faculty members.

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

Goal 1: may be assessed by introductory level graduate classes that provide students with a general knowledge of the literature in these fields. Given the breadth of student intellectual and academic

backgrounds, we examine how students develop capabilities to critically assess materials that expose them to complex policy or political issues. The faculty use literature reviews, research papers and exams in these courses to assess student progress. Moreover, faculty can assist students by identifying knowledge or methodological deficiencies early in their course of study when they can be more readily rectified.

Goal 2: may be assessed in courses that are specifically designed to enhance the student's methodological knowledge and their qualitative and quantitative data analysis abilities. Students are directed to appropriate courses for their fields as well as courses in which skills overlap across political science subfields (such as international relations). The faculty members are able to assess this knowledge through literature review essays, research papers, work with quantitative and qualitative data sets, or other applied research with which the faculty member may be involved.

Goal 3: is assessed in our international affairs classes in political science or other departments as appropriate. Faculty members assess students' understanding of these issues in the quality of their research papers or applied projects that test their ability to use their knowledge in specific policy or political arenas.

Goal 4: is most readily assessed when students participate in internships or other experiential assignments that bring them in contact with institutions and organizations which they analyzed in their academic readings. Students also have the ability to meet this goal by conference participation or other scholarly activity.

A report is annually submitted to the Dean of the college and includes 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**

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

#### **1. Improving Retention**

- Periodic assessment of our advising practices has provided the following areas requiring improvements:
  - Improved rigorous assessment in the first semester by working with faculty teaching required courses

- Improved professional orientation to better familiarize students with the demands in specific careers so that students see a better connection between classes taken and career goals
- Early intervention with students struggling in their coursework

## **2. Internationalizing our Curriculum**

- Two thirds of our MA students focus their studies on the international affairs curriculum, but a small number of our graduate classes are offered as pure graduate classes, forcing the students to take 4000-level classes and thus providing them with a less challenging academic environment.
- Conversations with faculty in the international affairs area are ongoing to better structure the curriculum. Having hired a new tenure track faculty member in International Relations last year and a new faculty member in Comparative Politics to begin in fall 2018 should continue to improve the quality of graduate level classes as well as exposure to career opportunities.

## **3. Enhance Career Preparation**

- Continue to improve the rate of graduate student paper presentations at academic conferences (goals 1 and 2).
- Work to improve the rate of participation in internships, especially among students who are planning to enter the workforce directly after graduation (goal 4).
- Encourage more students to attend sessions conducted by the departmental Executive-in-Residence (goal 4).
- Increased awareness of Dual Degree Programs: (goals 3 and 4).
- Use departmental funds to supplement GSIE funding for conference travel.

## **Planned Improvements**

### **1. Improving Retention:**

Retention starts with high quality screening and advising before students enroll in a graduate program to ascertain their suitability for that program. Students who have been admitted to the program are strongly encouraged to attend a Graduate School and departmental graduate orientations. These are held early in the fall semester of each year. Students meet with the Graduate Coordinator at least twice a year to discuss progress, examine career goals, and explore professional opportunities.

While all students receive a comprehensive evaluation at the end of each school year, earlier methods of intervention may be needed to identify struggling students and provide them with support. This requires closer cooperation with faculty teaching introductory level classes and by those faculty offering a written status report on students by mid-term. Struggling students will then be monitored to better address areas of deficiencies and chart a suitable course of classes for those students, including some remedial work if needed.

Efforts are ongoing to determine if these activities have improved retention and graduation in a timely manner. Several students in the program work full time and are part time students. We have consistently graduated over 70% of our cohorts within two years.

## **2. Internationalize our Curriculum**

The department will continue to improve its international relations and comparative politics curriculum by continually monitoring student interest in our core areas (Latin America; Middle East; Asia) and some of our international relations classes.

We will also continue to increase awareness of the dual degree program (JD/MA) by making sure that the graduate advisor works closely with the Dean of Academic Affairs Office at the Law School to recruit students to the joint JD-MA in international law and trade. This effort will take several years to determine improved outcomes (see next section). We are assessing challenges students may face in completing the MA component of the dual degree.

## **3. Improve Career Readiness**

Continue to increase awareness of the *Executive-in-Residence* program by holding workshops specifically designed for graduate students. We also plan to encourage students to take advantage of internships and opportunities to present their work at professional conferences. This is occurring; the department has financially supported graduate students out of its own funds to be able to attend and deliver research presentations at a second conference.

- In the absence of a Teaching and Research lab, the department has made major investments in our departmental library to provide research space for our students and faculty members collaborating with them. The department has also acquired 10 iPads and set up a mobile computer lab with 6 laptops and 6 macs.

**Analysis of post-graduation career and employment outcomes:** One of our biggest challenges is to track students after they leave our program. With the creation of website Alumni Update form, Facebook and LinkedIn sites we have been able to track the majority of our students. None of this is done in a systematic fashion, however.

Going forward, the plan is to utilize measures such as data from the Economic Success Metrics (ESM) to analyze outcomes. However, this aspect is the most difficult of the assessment efforts to improve within a short time frame as it requires additional staff resources to track students since the information in the ESM is rapidly becoming outdated.