

Assessment Plan Graduate Program

Goals:

The Department of Politics & Government at Illinois State University, offers a master's degree in Political Science in order to promote human knowledge and skills in the areas of scholarship, teaching, and service in and about the political dimensions of social life.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. The student possesses the ability to understand and evaluate political institutions and processes at an advanced level;
2. The student possesses the ability to conduct independent research on politics and government;
3. The student possesses skills at effective oral and written communication in professional communities that deal directly with politics or government;
4. The student possesses skills of effective civic and political engagement.

Measures	Outcomes				Use of Information
	1	2	3	4	
Focus group with graduate students	x	x	x	x	Students are led in a discussion by Director of Assessment and Graduate Committee, and extensive notes (almost a transcript) are compiled of what each participants says. A summary of findings is written, and then both the summary and the notes are shared with the faculty and retained each year for program review. The focus group is used to gain input from graduate students, a key stakeholder, as well as to ask them how well the program is reaching the four goals.
Graduate Survey	x	x	x	x	All graduate students are strongly encouraged to fill out a survey with both closed- and open-ended questions. The purpose of the survey is to compensate for limitations in the focus group, notably that it improves our ability to generalize about what the graduate students believe. Like the focus group, the survey is used to gain input from graduate students, a key stakeholder, as well as to ask them how well the program is reaching the four goals.
Comprehensive Exams and Thesis	x	x	x		The department will report comprehensive exam and thesis completion rates,

					including the median years to MA. Besides basic graduation statistics, the document will also include the comprehensive exam questions for each subfield for the designated period as an indicator of learning outcomes.
Alumni Survey			x	x	The department will examine the responses of the alumni survey to determine how much the program helped them achieve their career goals.

Examples of Changes Based on Assessment:

The focus group with graduate students has led to a number of changes. Students argued that there should be more seminars, including more seminars in research. The program has begun offering an increased number of graduate seminars during the 2007-08 academic year, including two extra research oriented courses. The students also argued that there should be an orientation for incoming graduate students. The graduate committee has added several orientations.

Steps for Improving Assessment:

A number of steps will be taken beginning the Spring of 2008 to improve the annual assessment of undergraduates:

1. The department will begin using information on theses and comprehensive exams to help determine how well it is reaching its learning outcome goals, as proposed above;
2. The graduate focus group will include questions that explore how well the department is reaching its learning outcomes;
3. The survey of graduate students should include questions that measure how many graduate students agree with statements made during the graduate focus group;
4. The graduate program should taken steps to insure that every graduate student fills out a graduate survey, since the number of graduate students are too low for sampling;
5. The department will take steps to increase the response rates of the alumni survey, so as to make the analysis of this data more valuable.

Review of the M.A., M.S. in Political Science 45.1001

Introduction. The master's program in the Department of Politics and Government is similar to master's programs offered in comparable universities in the state in regards to admission requirements, courses, and graduation requirements. However, what distinguishes Illinois State University is the offering of sequences. In comparison with IBHE comparator programs, Illinois State University had the highest degree completion level in 2003-2005.

Overview of Academic Unit. The Department is unique in its development and offering of three specialized sequences within the Master's degree in addition to providing an opportunity for a general degree in the discipline. Two particular features should be highlighted that make the Master's program unique: the Student Conference and the electronic journal *Critique*.

Overview of Degree Program. The Department of Politics and Government offers both Master of Arts and Master of Science degrees at the graduate level. The Department offers three specialized sequences: Public Service, Global Politics and Culture, and Community Development. It is also a participant in the joint degree in Applied Community and Economic Development.

Curriculum of the Politics and Government graduate program. The curriculum is designed to offer flexibility to the students to tailor a program that best meets their needs. The academic content of the Master's program is basically organized around the traditional subfields of the discipline. Parallel to the subfield structure, the Department also has three sequences: Global Politics and Culture, Public Service, and Community Development. "Methodology" is the only required seminar for all graduate students. However, to satisfy the methodology requirement, students have an option between Political Theory and Research Methodology. The Department is engaged in a process of implementation of the principle of methodological pluralism.

Faculty of the degree program. The Department of Politics and Government has assembled a highly qualified and dedicated faculty to teach in this program including one distinguished professor, seven full professors, five associate professors, and three assistant professors. A major asset of the Department's faculty is its diversity in terms of methodology, substance, gender, and national origin. The student evaluations provide strong evidence that students are quite satisfied with the quality of the instruction they are receiving.

The members of the graduate faculty have served on multiple thesis and comprehensive exam committees during this program review period as reported in the annual faculty productivity reports. Most of them have taught graduate seminars at least once per year and have engaged in considerable scholarship. Several members of the graduate faculty serve on national or international boards and are directly selected by their peers. Between 1998 and 2006, four faculty members have received research awards, and one a service award. Three faculty received grants. Between 1998 and 2006, the faculty published 31 books and edited books, 92 book chapters and articles, and 45 book reviews. In the same period, the faculty attended more than 150 professional conferences.

Program goals and quality measures. In March 2004 the American Political Science Association (APSA) published the Report from the Task Force on Graduate Education. The Report contains "principles" and "organizational suggestions" that could help as a guide for the future development of the Master's program. The Department of Politics and Government also maintains admission and completion standards at least as high as its IBHE comparator programs as well as its Carnegie benchmark programs.

Changes in level of student demand. Enrollments in the program have declined steadily since the last program review. The Department will work closely with Enrollment Management and Academic Services to monitor enrollment and recruiting strategies and confirm student demand for this program.

Summary of department student learning assessment plan. For the past several years, the Politics and Government Department has employed a systematic research design to measure student learning outcomes. The design involves a pre- and post-test measurement of student knowledge about politics and government employing a multiple choice and essay examination. The test has been administered six times, in the spring semester of the 1998, 2000, 2001 2002, 2003 and 2004 academic years. Graduate students have consistently scored better than freshmen and seniors in the four evaluations and in both the multiple choice and essay portions of the evaluation.

Accreditation from affiliated agency. There is no formal accreditation for the Political Science discipline.

Description of actions taken since the last review including instructional resources and practices and curricular changes. In the previous program review, the Department was criticized for lacking a coherent focus for its students. The Department determined that tracking students through sequences would best meet programmatic needs. The program is currently working towards a full implementation of a sequence structure. The 1998 Program Review recommended that “the department establishes and communicates through its publications a clearer programmatic focus for all aspects of the degree program.” In response to this recommendation, the Department developed and published a “Graduate Handbook.” The Department also provides on-going information on the Departmental website and through electronic communications with graduate students. Methodologically, departments of politics are adapting to demands for new approaches.

Major findings and recommendations and actions taken as a result of this review. Based on the program review process, the Department is undertaking the following initiatives and plans for the next three to five years: implementation of the principle of methodological pluralism, a combination of substantive breadth and depth through the full implementation of sequences, structured evaluation through changes in graduation requirements, and advising through the establishment of orientation sessions. The Department is considering the feasibility of developing a unique doctoral program.

Review outcome. The review process finds the M.A., M.S. in Political Science to be in Good Standing. Members of the Academic Planning Committee appreciated the well-written review report which responded to the last review and showed evidence of a thoughtful review process. The Committee commends the program for faculty and student participation in many international activities including several interdisciplinary minors and an active study abroad program. It is noted that program faculty are leaders in university-level governance and service activities.

The Academic Planning Committee requests the program work with the University Assessment Office to refine the program’s assessment plan and demonstrate program improvement efforts based on this plan. A full revision of the assessment plan should be completed by the start of the fall semester with a follow-up report due to the Academic Planning Committee on September 1, 2007.

The Committee also asks the department to conduct an analysis of factors affecting faculty recruitment and retention. The analysis should provide a plan to enhance faculty longevity and be submitted to the Academic Planning Committee by September 1, 2008.

Recommendations. The Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled program review cycle.

- Develop a short- and long-term plan that establishes academic goals and strategic direction for the program. Utilize this planning process to conduct a thorough self-analysis of the program's strengths and weaknesses and determine a more cohesive curriculum. This is a critical component when progressing toward development of a PhD program in Global Politics.
- Given changes in enrollment, work with the Graduate School and EMAS to determine an optimum enrollment and develop a recruitment plan.
- Identify qualities that are indicators of the program's uniqueness and identify ways to continually improve. This may include analysis of other aspiration programs at the national and/or international level.
- Assess current advisement staffing model to determine effectiveness of advisement.
- Identify external funding sources and support grantsmanship and scholarly productivity opportunities to maintain a national reputation.