Template for explaining a plan to assess student learning in a University General Education Core Curriculum course: PLSC 2003, American National Government; PLSC 2013, Introduction to Comparative Politics

WHAT UNIVERSITY GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES GUIDE STUDENT LEARNING IN COURSES THAT CARRY SOCIAL SCIENCES CREDIT?

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of nine hours of social science courses, students will be able to:

- (SSLO1) Articulate a method of inquiry in one of the social sciences

- (SSLO2) Identify and/or explain human organization and behavior

- (SSLO3) Identify and/or explain challenges associated with the diversity encountered by individuals, organizations, and/or societies

- (SSLO4) Identify and/or explain how technology affects individuals, groups, and/or social institutions

- (SSLO5) Identify and/or explain the changes caused by the increasing interconnectedness of today's world

HOW DOES THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE INTEND TO ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING OF THESE OUTCOMES IN PLSC 2003 AND PLSC 2013?

The Department of Political Science has two classes in the current "core": PLSC 2003 (American National Government) and PLSC 2013 (Introduction to Comparative Politics)

The Department of Political Science offered 23 on-campus sections of PLSC 2003, ranging from 75 to 300 students per section, for a total of 2,083 seats and four on-line sections of 35 students each through Global Campus for a total of 140 seats for the 2015-2016 academic year. At the start of the Spring 2016 semester, one on-campus section was taught by a tenured faculty member, one by a clinical assistant professor, four by instructors or visiting professors, and five by graduate teaching assistants. One on-line section was taught by a lecturer as well as two on-line sections by a faculty member during the summer.

The Department of Political Science also offered 9 on-campus sections of PLSC 2013, ranging from 35 to 150 students per section, for a total of 775 seats. No on-line sections of PLSC 2013 are currently being offered. At the start of the Spring 2016 semester, one on-campus section was taught by a tenured faculty member, two by instructors or visiting professors, and one by a graduate teaching assistant.

Students in both courses were given pre-test and post-test questions to assess learning. The pretest items were administered within the first two weeks of class in each of the two courses.

The same questions were administered again during the last week of classes. The total number of correct answers to the central political science questions were computed for each student on each pre-test taken and then comparisons were made between "pre" and "post-test scores." The items covered a set of approximately 8 core concepts measuring one (or more) of the learning outcomes stated above and covered in general Political Science courses taught in the department. All students participating in the assessment were asked a question related to whether this class is part of their major or is only being utilized as a general education requirement.

The distribution of pre- and post-test of selected students in PLSC 2003 and PLSC 2013 cover core items of the discipline that first year students should have command of after course completion. Each semester the faculty teaching these courses provide a report summarizing the results of the assessment to the department chair and the departmental assessment committee who then analyze these findings and then produce a comprehensive report for the departmental faculty.

Review of the overall performance pre- and post- should result in one of three outcomes: improvement of student post-test scores over the pre-test; no-improvement, and the decline in post-test scores compared with the pre-test. For those assessments that result in improvement in post-test outcomes, instructors may choose to take no action or examine ways to further improve positive outcomes. Results that include no improvement or decline should prompt instructor review of the course content, course objectives, classroom techniques, and assessment tools. For example, in those classes where no-improvement or decline might result, items on which the students are under-performing will be identified and learning objectives will be created to address the negative outcomes. Additionally, instructors in those courses where the assessment tools are distributed may select to interview a sample of students on the specific items of concern for additional feedback, to identify barriers, and to develop teaching strategies that may better serve underperforming or at-risk students. Since PLSC 2003 and PLSC 2013 are foundational courses for PLSC majors, the solicitation of the broader departmental review of the results and the proposed changes are necessary. The departmental assessment committee will conduct regular assessment, reports, and reviews on an annual basis.

HOW IS THE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT KEYED TO THE UNIVERSITY GENERAL EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?

Here are the 4 questions that will be included on the first examination and all subsequent examinations for **PLSC 2003**.

1. Which of the statements about voter turnout in the United States is true?
   a. Voter turnout is significantly higher in the United States than other democracies.
   b. Voter turnout tends to be significantly lower in the United States than other democracies.
   c. Voter turnout in the United States is at the level of most democracies.
   d. Voter turnout in the U.S. presidential elections varies wildly and can range from 10 percent of eligible voters to 80 percent of eligible voters.

   Question 1 is keyed to **SSL01** *and* **SSL02**.

2. What statement about voter registration is false?
   a. Unlike in some democracies, voter registration in the United States has historically been the responsibility of the individual citizen, not the government.
   b. During certain eras, states have used laws to discourage registration and voting by certain racial and socio-economic groups in their population.
   c. In recent decades, the Supreme Court has not allowed states to use literacy tests and poll taxes to disenfranchise voters.
   d. With the enactment of the Motor-Voter Act of 1993, citizens found it more difficult to register to vote.

   Question 2 is keyed to **SSL02** *and* **SSL04**.

3. In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *University of California Regents v. Bakke* that:
   a. All affirmative action plans are unconstitutional.
   b. All schools must use race as the sole factor when deciding admission.
   c. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was unconstitutional.
   d. Race can be used as one of many factors when deciding college admissions.

   Question 3 is keyed to **SSL03**.

4. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that:
   a. Ethnic minorities have no rights to equal treatment.
   b. The segregation of public school facilities by race violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution.
   c. The national government does not have the power to force any type of action on local school boards.
   d. Separation of races for certain reasons does not violate the Constitution.

*Question 4 is keyed to **SSL02** and **SSL03**.*

PLSC 2013 Introduction to Comparative Politics

*Here are the 4 questions that will be included on the first examination and all subsequent examinations for **PLSC 2013**.*

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the areas in which countries may have to enact reform in order to qualify for membership in the European Union?

   a. Democratic governance

   b. Domestic electoral practices

   c. Economic policies

   d. Human rights standards

*Question 1 is keyed to **SSL02** and **SSL05**.*

2. Which of the following is **not** one of the common motives behind creating transnational institutions?

   a. Reduce conflict

   b. Enhance regional trade

   c. Subordinate member states

   d. Facilitate cooperative policymaking

*Question 2 is keyed to **SSL02** and **SSL05**.*

3. The main difference between parliamentary and presidential systems is that:

   a. Parliamentary systems are better

   b. Parliamentary systems have many parties

   c. Presidential systems are more stable

   d. Presidential systems separate executive & legislative power

*Question 3 is keyed to **SSL01** and **SSL05**.*

4. Proportional Representation electoral systems tend to be better than Single-Member District Plurality electoral systems at:

   a. Increasing voter turnout

   b. Translating national party support levels into seats in parliament

   c. Producing two-party or two-party dominant systems

   d. Improving economic and social policymaking

*Question 4 is keyed to **SSL01** and **SSL02**.*

HOW WILL THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE USE THE DATA GENERATED BY THIS INTRUMENT TO PLAN CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL CHANGES THAT MIGHT BE NECESSARY IN PLSC 2003 and PLSC 2013?

In many ways, the PLSC assessment is the stereotypical "work in progress." Knowledge improvements also vary by instructor both overall and from question-to-question. This variation exists even sometimes when comparing a given instructor teaching multiple sections in one semester. The greatest improvements typically occur in areas where students score the lowest. For example, pre-test scores for Question #3 in PLSC 2003 often range from 30-40 percent correct. Post-test scores however are often 75-85 percent correct. By contrast, the post-test results for Question #4, which 80 percent of students correctly answer the question in the pre-test, only improve an additional 10 percent.

While most areas show significant improvement, it is not atypical for nearly half of the students in PLSC 2013 to get questions #1 and #4 incorrect in the post-test. The material is more challenging than that in the other questions for the two classes, but instructors in PLSC 2013 may want to discuss how to improve student learning outcomes in SSL02 and SSL04 or change the wording of the questions.

In addition the department needs to examine differences between students who major in PLSC or INST or related areas and those who come from other disciplines. This difference may be important in retention efforts, both within those programs for majors and at the university-level for non-majors.