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# PLSCBA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2021-22

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN WITH REPORTED OUTCOMES

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## **Program Goals for the B.A. in Political Science**

The B.A. in Political Science is a 39-hour four-year program. The department offers courses in three subfields: American Politics, Comparative Politics/International Relations, and Public Administration/Policy. Students can choose from two tracks. First, students with an interest in international relations or comparative politics are advised to complete the requirements for the degree by completing foreign language courses to satisfy the requirements of the major up to the intermediate II level or by taking courses. Second, students with more interest in domestic politics (which traditionally follows a quantitative approach) can take statistics, math, and PLSC 3603 Scope and Methods in Political Science, and philosophy.

Regardless of the track chosen, the Department of Political Science prepares its students to develop a thorough understanding of selected topics in domestic and international affairs. This includes a comprehension of diversity politics and policy and the analytical tools to assist in the realization of a more diverse, equitable and inclusive society, with an understanding of appropriate methodologies to study issues and topics associated with the field of political science.

Students are encouraged to seek out complementary majors or minors to round out their education (examples are majors in International & Global Studies, Economics, or Communications, or minors in Legal Studies or Southern Studies).

At the end of their undergraduate studies, PLSC studies should be able to:

1. understand the linkage between political, social, and economic issues, with special attention to diversity.
2. apply that knowledge to 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 the completion of a high-quality senior writing assignment where students demonstrate their written and analytical capabilities and is reviewed critically by a faculty member.

- Working with students in individual research projects centered around student interests (when 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 the ability of students to articulate links between political, economic or social issues, (2) assigning readings and employing examples, and (3) assigning substantial research papers by which students demonstrate their ability to recognize linkages and to understand 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. These require students to apply their knowledge to a specific real-world setting. Examples of such simulations occur in the courses PLSC 3233, The American Congress, PLSC 3153 Public Policy, and PLSC 4193 Administrative Law.

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 based on 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:** The department has a director of undergraduate studies who works with students on an “on-need” basis. All advising requirements are assumed by Fulbright College advising. A separate director is assigned to the Minor in Legal Studies. The director of undergraduate studies is also the department’s honors advisor. The department also uses an undergraduate advisor who engages students in extracurricular activities though Pi Sigma Alpha, which is the national honor society for Political Science.

**Online teaching:** The department continues to build its online course offerings through Global Campus. The department currently offers an online Minor in Political Science. Since 2019, five new courses were developed, bringing the total number of PLSC course offered through Global Campus to 18, with two more currently being developed.

**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:** The department continues to build its intersessions offerings. These now include PLSC 2003 American National Government, 2813 Introduction to International Relations and Global Studies (see below on program changes), 3503 Governments and Politics of East Asia, 3523 Politics of the Middle East, 4093 Politics and Policy on Film, and 4343 Money and Politics. The intersessions provided an opportunity to not only offer catalog-listed courses but to offer new and relevant special topic courses of interest to students.

**Internships:** To foster their professional development, 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 for

consistent use across different faculty and internship placements. To assist with recruiting both interns and employers, Political Science appointed its first internship director in 2020.

**Exit surveys:** One of our biggest challenges is to track students after they leave our program. With the creation of the Alumni Update form on our website and use of Facebook and LinkedIn sites we can track the majority of our students, though none of this is done in a systematic fashion. We are currently utilizing the “Career Outcomes Report” conducted by the Student Affairs Career Development Center.

**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.

## **Analysis of Results**

### **Assessment of barriers to timely graduation**

In the fall of 2021, there were 459 PLSC majors. In the spring of 2022 there were 444 majors. To address impediments to graduation the department will review its course offerings to increase the number of students allowed to enroll per class, if necessary. The department has in place a director of undergraduate studies. This individual meets with students regularly during the academic year and is available to assist with advising during summer orientation. Increasing the director’s opportunity to engage with at risk students is also a departmental goal.

### **Assessment of career readiness**

To advance their preparation for the workforce, students participate in internships and study abroad programs. They also participating in service-learning projects. A continuing challenge is relaying to PLSC majors the career and educational opportunities that align with a political science degree.

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

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

The department also hired for fall 2020 a new Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP) to teach public administration and policy courses to help cover the large section 2000-level courses.

The department has made significant commitments to:

1. Improving graduation rates by:
  - Increased communications to students. This is done using the department’s continually updated webpage and, social media outlets and, listserv of

undergraduate majors. Students receive communication via these media about the senior writing assignment (a graduation requirement), among other things.

- Increased engagement between the undergraduate director and Fulbright Advising. The director attends College retention meetings and summer orientation sessions for incoming freshman and transfer students.

2. 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. Courses on international relations and comparative politics also play a role in this regard.
- Increasing professional development by continuing to secure high quality internships, the revitalization of Pi Sigma Alpha (the departmental honors society) and continuing the department's support of the UA Prelaw Society and Mock Trial teams. The department will continue supporting undergraduate students interested in attending academic conferences or participating in faculty research.
- Improving internship preparation by streamlined the admissions and reporting processes and increasing participation in internships by raising student awareness of their availability and value. This has been facilitated by the creation of an internship coordinator in the department.
- Collaborating closely with the Fulbright College Employer Relations Office to alert students of career fairs and other career opportunities and disseminating this information via the listserv of majors.
- Encouraging students to apply for study abroad. The application of the Jack Reid Study Abroad Scholarship, and endowment scholarship which provides money to students to study abroad, will continue to be used as means to assist student with the costs associated with doing so.
- Continuing to develop and seek funding for the *Executive-in-Residence* program to provide students the opportunity to interact with experienced administrative and policy practitioners and to help them envision career trajectories with a degree in political science.