



SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

PLSCBA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2022-23

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 degree program. The department offers courses in three subfields: American Politics; Comparative Politics/International Relations, and Public Administration/Policy. Additionally, students can complete the requirements for the degree by completing foreign language courses to the intermediate II level or by taking courses in philosophy, statistics, and math.

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 inclusive society, with an understanding of appropriate methodologies to study issues and topics associated with the field of political science.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for the B.A. in Political Science

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 appropriate manner.
4. recognize the role of institutions and organizations in the shaping of politics in both domestic and international settings.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Currently, the undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes are explicitly assessed through the following means.

- **Pre- and post- knowledge inventory:** The PLSC department conducts short standardized Qualtrics surveys during the second week and the thirteenth week of the semester for each of PLSC's 2000-level courses consisting of a core set of questions for each course. The objective is to track knowledge acquisition over the course of the semester and to use the data that we gather to further strengthen our teaching methodologies in these crucial gateway courses.
- **Capstone survey:** The PLSC department conducts a survey of all students in enrolled in a required senior-level capstone course regarding their self-rated proficiency on each of the goals listed above in the 12th week of the class. It should be noted that starting in catalog year 2021, all PLSC majors are now required to complete a capstone course (either PLSC 4153 Public Policy or PLSC 4913 International Studies Seminar).
- **Senior Writing Requirement:** As part of the requirement for the PLSCA, students must complete a high-quality senior writing assignment (or honors essay) wherein students demonstrate their ability to write about and analyze political issues, construct a well-designed argument using appropriate academic literature, and

communicate in a professional manner. The final paper is reviewed and approved by a PLSC faculty member. The PLSC 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>. The PLSC department plans to develop a rubric that reflects the PLSC department's SLOs to be used by capstone course instructors when evaluating these senior writing assignments.

Departmental faculty also evaluate student performance on these Student Learning Outcomes on an on-going basis by:

- offering students assignments that advance the goals listed above and providing feedback and grades on these assignments.
- supporting students through internships, study abroad and other experiential outlets.
- working with students on individual research projects centered around student interests through independent study, directed readings, and research collaboration with faculty members.

Results of Analysis of Assessment of Student Learning Outcome

The following provide examples of processes used to determine student competency as aligned with the departmental goals noted above:

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 real world examples to illustrate conceptual material, and (3) assigning substantial research papers in which students can demonstrate their ability to recognize linkages and to understand the complexity of finding political or policy solutions to contemporary problems.

Goal 2 may be evaluated by encouraging and facilitating student involvement in internships and other experiential learning projects for which they earn course credits toward their degree. The department also assesses students' knowledge by encouraging them to participate in study abroad programs. Upon their return, we ask students to produce a written self-evaluation of what they learned while abroad.

Goal 3 is assessed by establishing clear expectations for 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 or PowerPoint presentations as part of a group or individually.

Goal 4 is most readily assessed when students participate in internships or other experiential learning assignments that foster close contact with the institutions and

organizations which were introduced in the classroom and in readings. Another way some faculty assess students' understanding is by offering in-class simulations. These require students to apply their knowledge to a specific real-world setting. Such simulations are currently integrated into courses such as: PLSC 3233 The American Congress; PLSC 3153 Public Policy; PLSC 4193 Administrative Law; and PLSC 4253 The U.S. Constitution I.

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 outcomes or processes:

Senior writing assignment: by completing an acceptable senior writing requirement (or honors essay), students demonstrate their ability to write about and analyze political phenomena, 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 designates an advisor to engage our undergraduates in extracurricular activities, such as membership in our local chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, which is the national honor society for Political Science.

Online teaching: The department continues to see robust growth in its online course offerings through Global Campus. The department currently offers 17 courses through Global Campus, a Minor in Political Science, and an interdisciplinary Minor in Legal Studies.

Intersessions: Another growth area for the department is in its intercession 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 have provided the department the opportunity to offer popular catalog-listed courses that can fill up quickly during full semesters. Intersessions also provide us with the exciting opportunity to introduce new and relevant special topic courses developed by our faculty that are of great 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. A departmental internship coordinator oversees the development of internships with employers, recruits students for these internships, and oversees the academic requirements for the interns.

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 Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn sites we can maintain contact with the majority of our students, but 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 to aid us in this endeavor.

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.

Changes to Degree Program Made or Planned Based on the Results

The department has made significant commitments in the past three years to:

- Increase communications to students on a variety of topics through the construction of a listserv for PLSCBA students and increased presence of the department on social media outlets; both efforts began in the fall of 2019.
- Increase engagement between the undergraduate director and Fulbright Advising. The undergraduate director attends college advisor meetings and summer orientation sessions for incoming freshman and transfer students.
- Continue support for student groups that focus on professional development and experiential learning. These groups include the UA Prelaw Society, the UA undergraduate mock trial teams, the department’s chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, and the UA chapter of the International City Managers Association.
- Improve internship preparation by appointing a departmental internship director who is charged with advertising internship opportunities to our students, seeking opportunities for internships, and standardizing the academic requirements for completing an internship.
- Collaborate closely with the Fulbright College Employer Relations Office to alert students of career fairs and other career opportunities.
- Encourage students to apply for study abroad opportunities. The application of the Jack Reid Study Abroad Scholarship, an endowment scholarship which provides funding for students to study abroad, will continue to serve as a valuable means to assist students with the costs associated with doing so. The department is currently advertising PLSC courses that will be offered at the Rome Center in the spring of 2024.

- Increase professional development by continuing to secure high quality internships, participating in the ongoing 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 remains committed to supporting undergraduate students interested in attending academic conferences or participating in faculty research.
- Encourage faculty to develop experiential learning/service-learning projects as more students express interest in such options. This is part of an ongoing effort, with several classes beginning to incorporate these elements into course design. The next step is for the department to develop better assessment tools to determine the impact of such efforts.