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PLSCBA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2024-25

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. To fulfill the requirements for the degree, students also complete foreign language courses to the intermediate II level or courses in philosophy, statistics, and math, depending on their concentration.

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 disparate impacts on divergent populations.
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-course 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 same set of questions are asked in both surveys. 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 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 students enrolled as PLSC majors since catalog year 2021 are now required to complete such a capstone course (either PLSC 4153 Public Policy or PLSC 4913 International Studies Seminar).
- **Capstone research paper:** The Capstone course includes a written research paper requirement that serves as an assessment of several relevant skills our students are expected to have acquired over their undergraduate career. The papers are

reviewed with careful attention to the student's: a) abilities to effectively convey information in a professional manner; b) follow standard protocols for an academic paper, e.g., citations, properly formatted bibliography, etc.; c) capacity for producing research that is analytical rather than simply descriptive.

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 honors theses.
- engaging in collaborative student-faculty research projects.

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, domestic and/or international service projects and other experiential learning ventures 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 demonstrated. Students give oral or PowerPoint presentations as part of a group or individually as part of their coursework. Such a presentation is required in our capstone courses.

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 achievement level assessment 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, 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; PLSC 2813 Introduction to International Relations and Global Studies (see below on program changes); PLSC 3233 The American Congress; PLSC 3503 Governments and Politics of East Asia; PLSC 3523 Politics of the Middle East; PLSC 4093 Politics and Policy on Film; and PLSC 4343 Money and Politics. The intercessions have provided the department with 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 to foster consistency in the application of standards across different faculty and internship placements. A departmental internship director oversees the development of internships with employers, recruits students for these internships, and oversees the academic requirements for the interns.

Alumni: In the past, one of our biggest challenges was to track students after they leave our program. However, the Political Science department now maintains an email database of roughly two-thirds of our alumni, allowing us to stay in communication with them. Our department also engages in outreach via the LinkedIn group University of Arkansas Political Science Department Alumni and Students Network, of which roughly 200 alumni are members. Our department is also active on other social media, including Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. We are currently utilizing the “Career Outcomes Report” conducted by the Student Affairs Career Development Center to aid us in tracking the career paths of our recent graduates, as well.

Job placement: The Career Outcomes Report provides us with a better understanding of the careers students go into and their average potential income for recent graduates. A significant number of PLSC students who responded to that survey are in graduate school, law school, or employed in various sectors. In the summer of 2024, we conducted an online survey that provided career information on roughly one-third of our graduates

Changes to Degree Program Made Based on the Results

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

- Enhance communication with students on a variety of topics through the construction of a listserv for PLSCBA students and amplifying the department’s visibility across social media platforms; these efforts began in the fall of 2019.
- Enhance interaction between the undergraduate director and Fulbright Advising by ensuring the director attends college advisor meetings.
- Continue support for student organizations dedicated to professional development and experiential learning. These include the UA Prelaw Society, the UA undergraduate mock trial teams, and the UA chapter of the International City Managers Association.
- The department’s Pi Sigma Alpha (PSA) chapter came under the leadership of a new faculty advisor and has since experienced dramatic growth as a result of his guidance. Historically, the chapter had a few dozen students on its rolls. But after the leadership change, membership jumped to roughly 85 in the early part of 2024 and by Fall 2024 it had leapt to over 125 enrolled members.
- Improved internship preparation by designating a departmental internship director who is responsible for promoting internship opportunities to students, actively seeking out new internship opportunities, and standardizing the academic requirements for completing an internship. Participation in the internship has been robust under the leadership of Dr. Joshua Lee Mitchell in terms of both the number

of students involved and the wide array of placement sites. For example, during the past academic year, roughly 50 students were awarded internships. They were placed in outlets as diverse as the House Committee for the Department of Homeland Security, the offices of both U.S. Senators from Arkansas, the U.S. Marshalls Service, and multiple different private legal firms.

- Collaborate closely with the Fulbright College Employer Relations Office to inform students about career fairs and other career opportunities.
- Encourage students to apply for study abroad opportunities. The Jack Reid Study Abroad Scholarship, an endowment which provides funding for students to study abroad, will continue to serve as a valuable means to assist students with the costs associated with such experiences. Currently, the department is promoting PLSC courses available at the UA Rome Center, highlighting our commitment to global education.
- Increased professional development through securing high impact internships, continued support for our rejuvenated and growing Pi Sigma Alpha 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 engaging in faculty-led research. We continue to have a vibrant tradition of encouraging our undergraduate majors to present their work or attend panels at professional conferences. For instance, during the past academic year, faculty members have accompanied students to both major conferences such as the Midwest Political Science Association (generally considered the second most significant conference in the discipline) and the prestigious National Conference of Black Political Scientists. Our students and faculty were also represented at the state-wide meeting of the annual Arkansas Political Science Association conference. In some cases, these presentations eventually resulted in the publication of co-authored student-faculty articles in refereed political science research journals.
- Encourage faculty members to develop projects centered around experiential learning/service-learning in response to increasing student interest. This initiative is already gaining traction, with many courses incorporating these learning components into course design. The next step is for the department to develop better assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of these endeavors.