

Millikin University
Student Learning in the Political Science Major

By Bobbi Gentry
June 19, 2011

Executive Summary

The Department of Political Science supports the mission of the University in preparing students for professional success, democratic citizenship in a global environment, and a personal life of meaning and value. The mission of the department is to produce graduates who achieve the following seven learning outcome goals:

1. Identify key questions, fundamental concepts, and theoretical

of Illinois (Mr. Dongsuk Kim) joined our faculty as an adjunct instructor. Based on

interviews, in a variety of venues, have increased Millikin's presence as an institution that contributes to the public discourse.

Based on current research and departmental discussions a few initiatives have been undertaken to improve the curriculum, offer flexibility and interest within the major. The Political Science department based on assessment data and discussions of what is covered in coursework throughout the major, decided to eliminate Introduction to Politics as a course. This particular course overlapped with courses that were already required within the major including Introduction to International Relations and American Political Systems. This course in previous assessments received a yellow indicator. Based on the previous assessments, the needed improvement was to improve our teaching of the departmental learning goals in the courses that emphasize subfield specialization rather than a broad overview of the discipline.

In addition to the elimination of Introduction to Politics, the department is working on improving the offerings to students by increasing the credits earned for model simulation course such as Model UN, Model Illinois Government, and Moot Court to more accurately reflect the amount of time, knowledge, and real world experience students learn from these courses. A proposal for the Fall 2011 semester will suggest a variable rate for these model simulation courses.

Two other major changes include the emphasis on research methods. By adding an additional faculty member with expertise and knowledge in research methods, we are now able to offer on a more frequent basis the Research Methods course that deals specifically with statistics for Political Scientists. On previous departmental advising sheets, the suggestion to take two math courses or our Research Methods course left the option open for students to study

reflected how film works as a medium to inform us about our political world. Research papers written within this course included comparing the film of _____ to actual Wall Street scandals, political portrayals of Oliver Stone, and the American Dream in Suburbia. These courses worked to help students fulfill their university studies requirements and develop their interest in politics.

During the Fall 2010 semester, three incoming freshman indicated Political Science as their major. By the end of Spring 2011, 24 students were either a major in Political Science or a minor. Fourteen of these students were majors and three graduated during this school year. Based on senior exit interviews, the most influential element to the decrease in majors was turnover in faculty. Lack of consistent faculty in the department has led students to choose other homes in Philosophy or other social sciences. Of the three students who graduated, one is going to law school, one will be lobbying for sororities in Washington and around the country, and the final student is seeking full time internships with a look towards graduate school. A new assessment with a senior exit survey has improved the reflection within the department as to how we can better serve our students.

Groups sponsored by the Political Science department have been especially successful this year. Our Moot Court team, under the direction of Dr. Money, again won state championship. Our Model UN team won a team award and several individual awards at their regional conference. The department has worked with interested students to create a College Republicans on campus, which allows for professional development activities including leadership within the organization. In addition, the newly formed group advised by Dr. Gentry hosted an open forum with State Representative Adam Brown to address student questions. This new group is optimistic about its future endeavors and looks forward to organizing trips to Springfield and Washington DC for students to experience politics firsthand.

The bus trip to Washington DC was meant to get students involved in a non-partisan rally hosted by political comedians Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. The "Rally to Restore Sanity" offered students a unique perspective on what people organizing can lead to mass participation. Dr. Gentry worked with rally organizers to get a bus out of Decatur so that Millikin students could have the opportunity to be a part of the rally without an additional burden. Even though efforts began slowly, eventually the total number of people going to the rally was 102. Community members and students took a whirlwind adventure of 36 hours to DC and back. This opportunity was not limited to the rally and offered a relatively inexpensive way for individuals to experience our nation's capital.

The Learning Story

Political Science continues to unite theory and practice in our coursework and extracurricular initiatives. Students within Political Science develop skills in argument, writing, oral presentation, and research techniques. Throughout their time at Millikin, Political Science majors will begin using the skills in their introductory courses, develop these skills in their sophomore and junior levels courses and culminate in a final research project that the student

presents either at a discipline oriented curriculum moves students toward gaining the necessary skills to be successful in their professional lives solid written and oral communication skills as well as critical and analytical thinking skills
Appendix I).

Over their four years in the program, majors will take a total of 41 credits worth of courses. Twenty of these hours will be in our foundation courses. An additional seven courses

Advising allows for our students to explore their future options, discuss plans of study and to meet with faculty about their current educational experiences. Advising sessions occur twice a year, but students are encouraged throughout the year to come in and meet with our faculty to discuss challenges and possibilities. Two of the most important elements of our advising session are to give students the opportunity to discuss future career plans and create a well-rounded schedule to provide students with the skills they need to be successful in their careers. Secondly, the advising session in Political Science is also meant to identify moments where our students are successful either in their coursework or politics oriented extra-curricular learning opportunities and explore how we can continue to promote these initiatives within the department.

Towards the end of their career students will meet with faculty members more frequently as they are developing their senior thesis project, discuss their internships, and explore options for life after Millikin. These opportunities have been utilized as anecdotal assessment of departmental goals and initiatives.

audiences. This experience was also invaluable to the student as they were completing their senior year. Several times the student remarked that they knew and felt what it was like to become a political scientist.

New assessments were introduced in the 2010-2011 academic year. One such assessment included a revised internship questionnaire upon completion of the internship and an updated theories. By including a book discussing the theories relating application of theory can be better achieved.

A new assessment of a senior exit survey will help the department better identify key skills, courses, and experiences that are crucial to student success within our department. The senior exit survey consists of an in-depth interview with a graduating major with one faculty member. The in-person interviews allow for the student to reflect on their four years with Millikin and their time within the Political Science department. Please see the attached senior exit survey within the Appendix. Based on the new assessment, a broad overview of improvements will be suggested and new institutional knowledge has been gained.

Assessment Instruments

In the department of Political Science, assessment of goals 1 – 4 involves the administration of pre- and post-tests in introductory classes (see Appendix II) to gauge student learning over the course of the semester. Since the development of the learning goals in

Answering 85 to 10

ia to
evaluate student progress in achieving learning goals:

GREEN (an acceptable level or clearly heading in the right direction and not requiring any immediate change in course of action): 80% or more of the students ranked

YELLOW (not an acceptable level; either improving, but not as quickly as desired or declining slightly. Strategies and approaches should be reviewed and appropriate adjustments taken to reach an acceptable level or desired rate of improvement): 60% to 80%

RED (our current status or direction of change is unacceptable. Immediate, high priority actions should be taken to address this area): fewer than 60% of the students ranked

In the department of political science, assessment of goals 5-
appl
learning over the course of their Political Science careers. Applying a GPA-like formula (5.0 for excellent, 4.5 for excellent/good, 4.0 for good, 3.5 for good/adequate, etc.) allows for a calculation of attainment of each learning goal on a scale from 5.0-1.0. The department

Learning Goal 4: Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to international relations

Rating for Goal 4: **International Relations not taught in 2010-2011**

Learning Goal 5: Solve complex problems by demonstrating a mastery of the substantive

This goal was measured by Dr. Gentry

The only senior thesis was judged as

Based on qualitative interviews with graduating seniors, several elements of the exit

American Political System and Introduction to International Relations. Based on this change we may consider eliminating this learning goal from future departmental goals to

Next year, the department will implement its new internship assessments with a three pronged approach: written assessment, assessment administered to the onsite internship personnel, and assessment of the student in their own learning experiences.

Additionally, considerations for coursework include creating an Introduction to Comparative Politics course, creating a variable rate for simulation courses (such as a student can take Model UN for 1, 2 or 3 credits) and considering that the Research Methods course be taught as a four credit course with computer access time such that students can work with the programs necessary for quantitative analysis.

Substantive Improvements for 2010-2011

In addition to departmental improvement with student learning goals and coursework, the department has worked to improve internship opportunities and connections with alumni. Based on a departmental initiative, alumni of Political science were contacted and were asked to provide their business cards. The purpose of this work was three-fold: 1) Current students can

Appendix I:

Appendix II: Pre- and Post-Tests for Introductory Political Science Courses

PO 100 Intro to Political Science

1. What is politics?
 - a. the art of argumentation and debate

7. In

PO 105 Introduction to American Government
Assessment Test Spring 2011

Name _____ Major _____

Rank _____

Please circle your answers. Answer to the best of your ability.

- 1) The greatest extension of the United States welfare state came when?
 - a) **in 1789 with the ratification of the Constitution of the United States**
 - b) **in 1865 with the establishment of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands**
 - c) **in 1935 with the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935**
 - d) **during**
 - e) in the 1980's with the Reagan Revolution

- 2) Bicameralism is defined as the:
 - a) division of the national government into two branches
 - b) division of the executive branch into the offices of President and Vice-President
 - c) division of the overall government into federal and state systems
 - d) division of the legislative branch into two chambers
 - e) division of political power through the two-party system

- 3) Divided government is best described as:
 - a) the difference between the federal, state, and local governments
 - b) the difference between control of government by the Republicans or the Democrats
 - c) the difference between the President's first and second term of office
 - d) when Congress is unable to agree on policy and no laws are passed
 - e) when one party controls the White House and the other controls one or both chambers of Congress

- 4) The jurisdiction of the federal judicial branch, including the boundaries of its districts and circuits, was defined by:
 - a) The Judiciary Act of 1789
 - b) Article III of the Constitution
 - c) Marbury v. Madison
 - d) Judicial review
 - e) The 4th Amendment to the Constitution

- 5) Which Chief Justice of the United States presided over the Supreme Court as it expanded rights of the criminally accused during the 1950s and 1960s?
 - a) Earl Warren
 - b) Warren Burger
 - c) Robert Bork
 - d) William Rehnquist
 - e) Oliver Wendell Holmes

6) The United States Congress has two functions: lawmaking and representation. Representation may be

Appendix III: Evaluation Rubrics for Senior Thesis

Thesis Proposal: Assessed by Department Faculty.

	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal
Knowledge Sources (Goals 1-4)	[6 points] Reflects a high level of integration of multiple sources of information and knowledge acquired in political science courses.	[4 points] Demonstrates only occasional integration of information from multiple sources and political science coursework.	[2 points] Demonstrates little or no integration of information from multiple sources.
Method (Goal 5)	[5 points] Presents a clear research design, including discussion of hypotheses to be tested, pertinent data, as well as methods skills acquired in the program and execution.	[3 points] Research design and hypotheses present, but proposal falls short in tying in pertinent data and relevant methods.	[1 point] No clear design or hypotheses, few if any connections to relevant data and methods. Proposal suggests methods incorrect for research question.
Clarity (Goal 7)	[3 points] Very few grammatical errors, if any. Sentences clearly express ideas, and paragraphs are coherent wholes. Overall structure is logical and coherent and contributes to overall strength of proposal.	[1 point] Common errors in usage and sentence structure. Sentences and paragraphs may run too long or too short. Variation in coherence of paragraphs and clarity of logic.	[0 points] Many spelling and grammar errors, use of incomplete sentences, inadequate proof reading.

Written Thesis: Assessed by Department Faculty.

	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal
Literature Review (Goal 1)	[6 points] Presents a well-organized review of pertinent political science literature. Demonstrates clearly how previous findings relate to the project at hand. Builds toward a clear hypothesis.	[4 points] Review of pertinent political science literature present; however, connections to current project tenuous or in a few cases absent.	[2 points] Superficial to no connection of project to pertinent political science literature.
Analysis (Goal 5)	[5 points] Makes clear connections between findings in the data and established knowledge in the field. Demonstrates superior mastery of the material. Suggests and explores areas for possible future research.	[3 points] Connections between findings and established knowledge present, but analysis fails to make some of them clearly. Demonstrates ample mastery of the material. Only suggests without much elaboration future avenues of research.	[1 point] Few to no connections between established knowledge in the field and Questionable mastery of the material.
Clarity (Goal 7)	[3 points] Very few grammatical errors, if any. Sentences clearly express ideas, and paragraphs are coherent wholes. Overall structure is logical and coherent and contributes to overall strength of proposal.	[1 point] Common errors in usage and sentence structure. Sentences and paragraphs may run too long or too short. Varied coherence of paragraphs and clarity of logic.	[0 points] Many spelling and grammar errors, use of incomplete sentences, inadequate proof reading.

Senior Presentation Assessment

Presentation Assessment

Your Initials _____

When using a five point scale, 1=poor and 5=excellent and where 3 is average. Where would you rate the presenter in each of these categories?

Presentation Style	1	2	3	4	5
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to Answer Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Engaging	1	2	3	4	5
Easy to Understand	1	2	3	4	5

Name one thing you learned from the presentation:

What did you like about the presentation?

What could have been improved?

Appendix III: Senior Exit Interview

SENIOR EXIT SURVEY
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

1. Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
E-Mail Address: _____

2. -

E. Student-faculty Ratio	1	2	3	4	5	6
F. Career/Job Counseling	1	2	3	4	5	6
G. Internship Opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6

8. Of the items you rated above, which are the most important to you? Why?
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
9. As a student, what do you think were the greatest strengths of the Department of Political Science major program? Why?
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
10. As a student, what do you think were the greatest weaknesses of the Department of Political Science Major program? Why?
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
11. How well did the Political Science major do in preparing you for a graduate school, law school, or additional training? Please circle your response. 1= Poor to 6= Excellent
- 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Which particular Political Science courses did you take that most relate to your current work? Please circle your response(s).

PO 100	Introduction to Politics
PO 105	The American Political System
PO 220	Current American Foreign Policy
PO 221	Introduction to International Relations
PO 223	Political Participation and Democratic Citizenship
PO 224	Group Influence in America
PO 235	Introduction to the Criminal Justice System
PO 240	State and Local Government
PO 244	Campaigns and Elections
PO 260	Topics in Political
PO 280	Methods of Political Research

PO 300	Media and Politics
PO 301	Political Behavior and Opinion
PO 305	Philosophy of Law
PO 310	Political Philosophy
PO 315	Supreme Court in American Politics
PO 320	International and Law and Organization
PO 321	Global Issues
PO 322	Topics in Comparative Politics
PO 323	Topics in World Politics
PO 324	Politics of the Developing World
PO 330	Constitutional Law
PO 334	Civil Liberties and the Constitutions
PO 340	The American Congress
PO 348	The American Presidency
PO 356	Topics in Public Policy
PO 360	Topics in Political Science
PO 361	Washington Internship of Practicum
PO 362	Washington Experience
PO 363	Washington Leadership Forum
PO 365	Political Simulations
PO 371, 372	Internship
PO 391, 392	Independent Studies in Political Science
PO 400	Seminar in Political Science
PO 410	Political Science Professional Development
PO 450	Senior Thesis

13. Which particular Political Science courses or experiences most relate to your present personal life? Please circle your response(s).

PO 100	Introduction to Politics
PO 105	The American Political System
PO 220	Current American Foreign Policy
PO 221	Introduction to International Relations
PO 223	Political Participation and Democratic Citizenship
PO 224	Group Influence in America
PO 235	Introduction to the Criminal Justice System
PO 240	State and Local Government
PO 244	Campaigns and Elections
PO 260	Topics in Political
PO 280	Methods of Political Research
PO 300	Media and Politics
PO 301	Political Behavior and Opinion
PO 305	Philosophy of Law
PO 310	Political Philosophy
PO 315	Supreme Court in American Politics
PO 320	International and Law and Organization
PO 321	Global Issues

PO 322

