

Millikin University
Student Learning in the Political Science Major

By Bobbi Gentry
July 1, 2013

Executive Summary

The 2012-2013 year has been amazing for Political Science in three major ways: the increase of majors, creation of a new interdepartmental minor, and student and faculty success. The number of Political Science majors has increased for the past three years due to ongoing efforts of both students and faculty. The current number of majors includes 27 majors, up from 7 three years ago. The new interdepartmental minor in Criminal Justice has opened up several new opportunities including collaboration across campus, internships and new relationships with the Decatur departments of criminal justice (Adult Redeploy Illinois). Students have been particularly successful this year with a student traveling to France on the McIntire Fellowship, a student earning the Scovill award, two students getting admitted to Washington DC internships, and students presenting their work at the Day of Scholarship. Lastly, faculty have been particularly successful by receiving the Griswold Professorship in the Social Sciences, publishing and presenting at conferences.

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 frameworks critical to an understanding of the political world;
2. Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to American politics;
3. Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to comparative politics;
4. Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to the area of international relations;
5. Solve complex problems by demonstrating a mastery of substantive knowledge in the discipline's main subfields;
6. Follow scientific and humanistic methods to design and carry out politically-oriented research projects by utilizing sufficiently advanced social research methods;
7. Communicate effectively political knowledge to general audiences as well as colleagues in the field.

The major's majo ajo ajor'



thinking skills—and toward meeting the department’s learning goals. (See curriculum map in 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 within the major allow our students to specialize in either American Politics or International Politics. Our foundation courses help us to assess and maintain high expectations of our students, while also creating a course of study that offers content, skills, and individualized attention.

In the first year of the major curriculum, students set about the task of acquiring basic knowledge in the various subfields of the discipline. Two major courses taken during the first year of study cover the basic concepts and theoretical frameworks. PO 105: The American Political System places politics into the domestic setting and encourages students to begin asking questions about their country and how they can be active citizens. PO 221: Introduction to International Relations sets the stage for a more international understanding of how countries interact with one another and what the consequences are for how countries view one another. The American Political System is taught every semester, but majors are suggested to take this course during their first semester to improve their understanding of politics in an international setting, which is generally taught during the Spring semester.

In their second year, students acquire basic research skills through either the department’s Methods of Political Research (PO 280). Within this course students will begin to work with developing a testable research question, acquire data to help them answer their question and utilizing statistical techniques to answer their questions. Additionally, majors take a course in macroeconomics. These courses provide majors with the essential foundational experiences we expect our majors to employ in their upper-level courses and senior-year thesis.

In the second and third years, political science majors broaden their knowledge through electives. Students’ particular interests guide their choice of tracks of electives, and through these intensive

senior year. Several times the student remarked that they knew and felt what it was like to become a political scientist.

Assessments implemented in the 2011-2012 continued in the 2012-2013 assessment include new standards for internships including a questionnaire and evaluation of student presentations. These new assessments do seem to provide additional information about the nature and progress of our majors.

“**RED** light” (our current status or direction of change is unacceptable. Immediate, high priority actions should be taken to address this area): score less than 3.0.

>Assessment Results

Learning Goal 2: Identify the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and theories central to American politics

American Politics	Spring 2012
Mean Correct Answers	5.52/10

Nominal (0 – 49 % Correct)T EM

single sample can skew the results, but all indications suggest that the department has improved its rating of learning goal 6

Rating for Goal 6: **GREEN**

Learning Goal 7: Communicate effectively political knowledge to general audiences as well as colleagues in the field.

Of the only senior thesis, this one was judged to be “excellent” using the department’s rubric. As for oral communication of the paper’s results,

Assessment Measure	Average
Presentation Style	4.36
Creativity	4.09
Knowledgeable	5.0
Ability to Answer Questions	4.81
Engaging	4.18
Easy to Understand	4.45

Rating for Goal 7: **GREEN**

Improvement Plans

Despite the somewhat discouraging nature of these results, the department will not make major changes to its courses or assessment plan in 2012-2013. There are two reasons for this. One, this assessment plan has only been comprehensively implemented for one year, so it does not provide enough evidence to stimulate drastic changes.

Still, certain things are planned that might improve the **YELLOW** ratings on the three learning goals:

Learning Goal 2: A better assessment of the pre/post text is needed to assess student learning for both the Spring and Fall semesters. This implementation is acknowledged by Dr. Gentry and will be improved in the next assessment report.

Learning Goal 4: An introduction to International Relations Course will be taught in the Fall 2013 semester and will be assessed then.

Learning Goals 5 and 6: New implementation of a proposal due the semester before the senior thesis has improved feedback and engagement with the faculty member and students. As one on one projects develop, the focus on evaluation of scholarly research has taken a more central role in the discussion of results. As stated from the previous assessment report, this new proposal method seems to have encouraged students to

consider what it means to pose a research question in Political Science and to investigate it through various methods.

This assessment exercise has stimulated other questions that will

access to the available detail on political science programs at community colleges and to establish advisor contacts. This initiative will be followed through in the Fall 2013 semester.

Goal 1 was clearly met by the increase in recruitment numbers with ten new Political Science majors for the incoming year, increased visibility mattered. With the debate watching events, Monticello High School joined us for the Vice Presidential debate and a Macarthur high school teacher and student attended the second presidential debate. These opportunities have increased visibility across campus and within the community since the Herald and Review, WAND and a Springfield news station covered the events. A student worker with expertise in website design changed many of the elements of the website after evaluating successful and unsuccessful Political Science program websites. The revisions included more seamless transition throughout the website, action shots of students, and an internship page where students could discover different opportunities.

Goal 2 included a complete rethinking of research in Political Science. The new departmental policy is included in the Appendix IV, and training included discussions with the department chair, mandatory explanation in all syllabi and workshops on Turnitin.com.

Goal 3 has contributed to the opportunities for students to pursue performance learning in action. In the Fall 2012 semester, Model United Nations was taught as a three credit course. In the Spring 2013 semester, Model Illinois Government was taught as a three credit course. As a course, each of these model simulations is performance learning in Political Science. Students are acting in roles such as a representative to the United Nations or a legislator at the state level. Students learn to articulate their stances on resolutions and bills, argue their points, and compromise. In essence, our students are performing just as representatives would.

Appendix I:

Appendix II:

measured along different dimensions. Which of the following terms refers to Congress's ability to represent constituents' _____

7) "Framing"

refers to the tendency of the voter to "box out" information presented by other political parties

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

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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?

PO 300
PO 301
PO 305
PO 310

Media and Politics
Political Behavior and Opinion
Philosophy of Law

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

14. What courses do you wish you could have taken that were not available in the department?

15. Were you involved with the following experiences? Please circle your response.

A.	Model Illinois Government	YES	NO
B.	Model United Nations	YES	NO
C.	Washington Semester	YES	NO
D.	Drew University/United Nations	YES	NO
E.	Semester Abroad	YES	NO

16. What four or five pieces of information presented in Political Science courses have you carried with you to this day?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

17. What undergraduate experiences, courses or opportunities would have added to your college experiences? Why?

18. What skills did you

Appendix IV: Plagiarism Policy

Political Science Plagiarism Policy

The goal of this policy is for students to correctly cite, paraphrase, and write in their own voice. Plagiarism is the uncited use of another's words, ideas, or work. Self-plagiarism is the use of one's own work for multiple assignments that has not been approved by faculty. Consequences of plagiarizing are a zero on the assignment, redoing the assignment for no credit, and a letter is sent to the registrar, dean, and to the student explaining that the student has plagiarized in the course. When the plagiarism is severe enough on one assignment (i.e. the entire paper) or has occurred multiple times in the single course, consequences are failure in the course indicated by an XF and a letter written to the registrar, dean, and student will be sent. All written assignments in Political Science will be submitted to Turnitin.com and all faculty in Political Science have been trained to use this website. Any concerns about this policy can be addressed by the chair of the Political Science Department.