

**Millikin University**  
**Student Learning in the Political Science Major**

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**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 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 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.

science at both the introductory and advanced levels, grounding them in the basic conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the discipline. Majors also receive training and acquire functional competency in elementary descriptive and inferential statistics. The program requires students to unite theory and practice through a politically-oriented internship. Finally, the major curriculum culminates in a senior thesis learning in a subfield (or across subfields) with advanced political science research practices.

In addition to regular assessment in the classroom, we assess student learning at two spe courses at the beginning of their careers and through a senior research project.

The department developed an assessment plan in 2008-9 but barely implemented it that year, assessing only one section of the introductory American Government course. There was a more extensive assessment in 2009-10 and the department's results were mixed. Student learning in three of our goals (#'s 2,4,7) was rated as \_\_\_\_\_ and student learning in three goals (#'s 1,5,6) was rated as \_\_\_\_\_. We need to develop some way to assess student learning regarding goal 3.



Additionally, the department sought and was successful in establishing an affiliation between Millikin University and The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars. This new relationship significantly broadens the number of potential internship experiences for the department, although no majors participated in the Washington Center program in 2009-10.

The department had 19 majors this past year and graduated 5. Graduates go into a variety of post-BA vocations and experiences. A significant percentage (3 of 5 in 2010) go to law school. Other students have continued their education in graduate programs, including those in political science, public administration, and international relations. Still others have gone on to become practitioners of the political arts in a variety of public service positions. Thus, the department has seen graduates in a variety of relevant careers.

### The Learning Story

The department revised its curriculum to enhance the preparation upon which majors can build their advanced coursework; the importance of discipline-appropriate research skills. The revision of the curriculum also stressed the importance of professional preparation through the inclusion of a senior thesis research project. The 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--and toward

Appendix I).

In the first year of the major curriculum, students set about the task of acquiring basic knowledge in the various subfields of the discipline. The first course majors take, Introduction to Politics (PO 100), provides

practical political and vocational knowledge to the resources with which they can complete their major requirements.

The political science curriculum requires majors to integrate basic and enhanced knowledge of political phenomena, research skills, and the practical experiences gained over the course of the previous three years into a senior thesis project (PO 450). Majors work with faculty members to develop research proposals which they then execute in written form and

Just as the curriculum assists the department in achieving its goals for student learning outcomes, so too does the advising process. Advising in the department facilitates and integrates

In order to realize this mission, we try to help students:

1. Develop plans of study for successfully achieving their degree and career goals,
2. Select courses each semester to progress toward fulfilling their plans of study,
3. Use the resources and services on campus to assist in fulfilling their plans of study, and
4. Graduate in a timely manner.

At least once a semester, students meet in person with their academic advisors to discuss progress toward fulfilling the plan of study.

### Assessment Methods

classes and in many different ways thro

through the curriculum,

In a discipline such as ours, it is critical that majors have a solid foundation on which to in mind and are committed to assessing student learning in these courses in order to insure that Successful completion of and learning in



**RED** (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 1: Identify key questions, theoretical frameworks and concepts critical to an understanding of the political world.

<b>Intro to Politics</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>
Mean Correct Answers	6.0/10	7.3/10
Nominal (0 63 % Correct)	62.5%	31.3%
Adequate (64 84% Correct)	31.3%	50%
Excellent (85 100% Correct)	6.3%	18.8%
Number of Students	16	16

Rating for Goal 1: **YELLOW**

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

<b>American Politics</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>
Mean Correct Answers	19.6/35	35/35
Nominal (0 63 % Correct)	67.6%	0%
Adequate (64 84% Correct)	32.4%	0%
Excellent (85 100% Correct)	0%	100%
Number of Students	37	37

Rating for Goal 2: **GREEN**

Learning Goal 3: The department needs to find a way to assess student learning of this goal. See

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

<b>International Relations</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>
Mean Correct Answers	5.6/10	7.8/10
Nominal (0 63 % Correct)	80%	20%
Adequate (64 84% Correct)	20%	80%
Excellent (85 100% Correct)	0%	0%
Number of Students	5	5

Rating for Goal 4: **GREEN**

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

excellent, one good/excellent, one good/adequate, one adequate, and one nominal.  
Applying a GPA-

Rating for Goal 5: **YELLOW**

Learning Goal 6: Follow scientific and humanistic methods to design and carry out politically-oriented research projects

This goal was measured largely by an examination of the bibliography of senior thesis  
Three of the  
rubric; one was judged  
-like calculation

Rating for Goal 6: **YELLOW**

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

Five of the seven senior theses

with that so  
thesis requirement.

This assessment exercise has stimulated other questions that will be pursued in the next year, once Dr. Gentry is on board:

The post-test results for the American Government course, Goal 2, seem exceptionally and unrealistically good, with all students earning 100%. However, there will be a new instructor of this course in the fall, Dr. Gentry, so any problems with the pre-test/post-test in that course may be addressed.

Political Science careers and not just at the beginning and end of it? There was, apparently, some discussion of doing so in the original assessment plan on which this report is based, but no mechanism was ever implemented.

Given the importance assigned to practical experiences by the department and the institution, there should probably be some way to assess student learning in their internships.

University Goals

1. Professional success
2. Democratic citizenship in a global environment
3. A personal life of meaning and value

Department 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;
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Curriculum Map of Core PO

Learning Goals	Core PO Courses					
	PO 100	PO 105	PO 221	PO 280	PO 371	PO 410



- d. all of the above
7. In a country with a unitary system of government
- a. the central government possesses all legitimate power
  - b. power is divided between the central government and regional governments
  - c. there are three branches of government, executive, legislative, and judicial
  - d. the government is illegitimate
8. Which of the following is not a necessary attribute of democracy?
- a. periodic elections
  - b. checks and balances
  - c. popular involvement in politics
  - d. free and independent media
9. In international politics, the primary distinction between the "North" and the "South" is
- a. political
  - b. economic
  - c. demographic
  - d. environmental
10. In the years since World War II
- b. the world has developed ways to prevent a repeat of the WWII-like Holocaust
  - c. there has been a reduction in the number of wars
  - d. Europe has seen more wars than Asia

1. What are the two major purposes government seems to have served throughout history?
  - a. Creating a national identity and accumulating money in a treasury
  - b. Defending borders and promoting freedom
  - c. Maintaining order and providing public goods like drinking water and roads
  - d. Representing the people and protecting minorities
  
2. What is the source of the power of the U.S. government?
  - a. The President and his White House staff
  - b. A small group of wealthy people with business connections
  - c. The people of the United States
  - b. The state governments that sent delegates to write the original Constitution
  
3. What fundamental values (beneficial, desirable end states or traits to be advanced, enhanced and promoted) did the people who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution set out to guide government and political decision making?
  - a. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
  - b. The general welfare of the people and the equality of all mankind
  - c. Order, freedom and equality
  - d. Justice and domestic tranquility
  
4. What do we call the sequence of the basic political values someone uses to think about political issues?
  - a. Political socialization
  - b. Socioeconomic variable
  - c. Party identification
  - d. Political ideology
  
5. How do participants in U.S. government and politics use its fundamental values?
  - a. As measurement standards to assess what is important
  - b. As evaluation standards for judging their behavior and the behavior of others
  - c. As guidelines to decide how to distribute available resources
  - d. All of the above
  - e. Only b. and c.
  
6. How does U.S. democracy operate?
  - a. A stable small group of elites sharing vast wealth and business connections consistently influences government decisions.

b. Different groups with interests common only among their separate memberships influence



26. Which activity listed below distinguishes a political party from an interest group?
- Advocating for a particular constituency
  - Organizing voters
  - Sponsoring candidates for public office under the organization's name
  - Having agendas to get improvements in problem areas
27. Which preliminary election early victories are important for political party presidential hopefuls?
- Illinois and Utah
  - California and Connecticut
  - Iowa and New Hampshire
  - District of Columbia and Wyoming
28. Which policy position below does both the Republican and Democratic Party support?
- Diversification/affirmative action programs
  - Trade unionism/organization of workers
  - Reductionism/downsizing government
  - Capitalism/private ownership of the means of production

33. The Fourth Amendment includes:
- The right to counsel
  - The prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment
  - The right to be secure against unreasonable search and seizure
  - The right against self-incrimination, i.e., to be compelled to be a witness against yourself
34. \_\_\_\_\_ was the Supreme Court decision that required specific constitutional rights warnings to be given:
- To anyone a police officer talks to
  - To everyone under suspicion of illegal activity
  - To everyone stopped for a traffic violation
  - To anyone in police custody when interrogated by the police
35. What standard is the Supreme Court using now to determine if the imposition of a death sentence or the particular way that will be used to execute a prisoner is cruel and unusual?
- Any punishments used when the Constitution was written are acceptable.
  - Punishments involving pain in the statutory proposed method or in the actual way they are carried out are unacceptable.
  - The evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society determine whether a punishment is acceptable.
  - Public opinion sets the standard for what punishments are acceptable for particular crimes.

**PO 221: Introduction to International Relations**

1. International politics is the study of:
  - a. diplomatic, military and political relations between states
  - b. the global economy
  - c. peoples, groups and organizations that act internationally
  - d. all of the above
  
2. Which theory emphasizes a cooperative approach to international politics?
  - a. idealism
  - b. realism
  - c. Marxism
  - d. neorealism
  
3. The contemporary international system could be best described as:
  - a. multipolar
  - b. bipolar
  - c. unipolar
  - d. tripolar
  
4. Sovereignty is:
  - a. a king or queen
  - b. the ability to act independently from external actors or internal rivals
  - c. international law, as laid out by the UN security council
  - d. only guaranteed when a state has a written constitution
  
5. A state is:
  - a. a legal entity that possesses territory, sovereignty and a government
  - b. a culturally cohesive community that shares political aspirations
  - c. the only important actor in international relations
  - d. the highest form of political organization

6. The "security dilemma" states that:
  - a. no state will ever achieve absolute security
  - b. all states need security, but rarely invest enough in it
  - c. when states attempt to increase their security, they make others feel less secure
  - d. without a strong state like the U.S., there will be insecurity in the international system
  
7. The logic behind the nuclear strategy of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) is
  - a. deterrence
  - b. elimination of all weapons
  - c. ensuring first strike capability
  - d. supporting defense systems such as ballistic missile capability
  
8. The possible unification of Islamic countries would be an example of
  - a. irredentism
  - b. nationalism

### Appendix III: Evaluation Rubrics for Senior Thesis

**Thesis Proposal:** Assessed by Department Faculty.

	Excellent	Adequate	Nominal
Knowledge Sources (Goals 1-4)	<b>[6 points]</b> Reflects a high level of integration of multiple sources of information and knowledge acquired in political science courses.	<b>[4 points]</b> Demonstrates only occasional integration of information from multiple sources and political science coursework.	<b>[2 points]</b> Demonstrates little or no integration of information from multiple sources.
Method (Goal 5)	<b>[5 points]</b> 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.	<b>[3 points]</b> Research design and hypotheses present, but proposal falls short in tying in pertinent data and relevant methods.	<b>[1 point]</b> No clear design or hypotheses, few if any connections to relevant data and methods. Proposal suggests methods incorrect for research question.
Clarity (Goal 7)	<b>[3 points]</b> 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.	<b>[1 point]</b> 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.	<b>[0 points]</b> 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)	<b>[6 points]</b> 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.	<b>[4 points]</b> Review of pertinent political science literature present; however, connections to current project tenuous or in a few cases absent.	<b>[2 points]</b> Superficial to no connection of project to pertinent political science literature.
Analysis (Goal 5)	<b>[5 points]</b> 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.	<b>[3 points]</b> 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.	<b>[1 point]</b> Few to no connections between established knowledge in the field and  Questionable mastery of the material.
Clarity (Goal 7)	<b>[3 points]</b> 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.	<b>[1 point]</b> 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.	<b>[0 points]</b> Many spelling and grammar errors, use of incomplete sentences, inadequate proof reading.

