

I. Executive Summary

Note: Professor Lumumba-Kasongo was on leave for Spring 2014. This report was prepared by Professor Susan Tabrizi, Department Chair.

The focus of assessment in Political Science for 2013-2014 was the nature of the senior experience, specifically: the senior seminar, senior thesis and public presentations. We have also begun an examination of course level characteristics and resulting pre-requisites, in line with conversations ongoing in the Educational Policy Committee. Political Science graduated 4 seniors in Spring 2014, each of whom prepared and presented a senior thesis, wrote and passed comprehensive exams (eliminated for forthcoming years by faculty vote) and successfully completed the requirements in the major. Seniors were not equally prepared to complete the thesis project and several struggled through the process. The results in two cases were poor and student commitment to project quality was low. The one-semester model is problematic for the type of thesis project we require from seniors (original data collection and analysis). In 2014-2015 we have 2 seniors who will work through the process. Our focus for the upcoming year will be to consider campus-wide discussions about the senior experience, in majors and in terms of general requirements, as we continue to refine our process for seniors. In addition, Political Science will work to enhance its presence on campus through continued campus-wide programming and online resources.

Summary of Annual Assessment Review and Planning Discussion

The focus of assessment for 2013-2014 remained the nature of the senior experience in our major. As was noted in earlier assessment reviews, the move to a one-semester model for thesis development and implementation remains problematic. The 2013-2014 senior seminar was again exclusively focused on senior thesis projects, eschewing the ½ semester topic model of prior years. This did allow students to focus on their own work. However, despite the fact that students all had completed the required research design course prior to the thesis semester, and, as planned, conversations about thesis work started very early, students still struggled with narrowing the focus of a thesis topic, gathering data, and implementing their work plans. Students who were motivated and genuinely interested in their thesis topics did well; those that were less engaged did less well. This was compounded by the fact that less motivated students lacked general writing skills and, once they fell behind, had difficulty pulling the final product together. Our conclusions are that students either need more time to complete this level of thesis work or that our model for the senior experience needs to change.

In terms of thesis presentation, it will be useful to consider the differences between poster and oral presentation models. This year, students presented their “in-progress” projects during the Celebrating Scholarship and Engagement Day in November. Students all reported that the experience helped them to conceptualize their project and that the process of explaining it to others in this setting was very useful in helping them understand their own work. The poster session was well-attended and students and faculty from many disciplines on campus stopped to engage seniors in conversation about their research. Formal thesis presentations at the end of the semester remained poorly attended (with only one or sometimes no audience members besides examining faculty). While students generally performed well and were able to answer questions about their work, this experience was not satisfying as the result of hard work was not widely shared on campus.

Last year’s assessment report included a need to focus on internships and the promotion of internships prior to senior year in addition to during the semester. Only one senior waited until the Spring semester to complete the internship requirement and that is an improvement over past years. Three internships major were completed during the Spring semester, two of which were via online interactions with site hosts. The online models did not work as well as intended as supervisors were either lacking in communication ability (some were not e-savvy) while others were non-responsive to student requests for direction. Student initiative was also an issue in maintaining open and regular communication. That said, the semester and online models for internships remain avenues that we will continue to explore as we further integrate internship experience in to the major.

Our review of pre-requisites and course-level requirements awaits direction from EPC as that committee is engaging in a college-wide assessment of current and best practices.

II. Plans for Coming Year

Political Science will continue to assess the success of our current senior model and will work with colleagues across the college, under the guidance of EPC, as we begin to design a better model for our students. It is clear that the current all-senior high-level original research model for our seniors is not working in a one-semester timeframe and it is not necessarily the appropriate type of senior project for our current students and their future career needs.

As noted above, we will take direction from EPC and engage in a review of our pre-requisites and course-level characteristics and current designations.

Political science will also continue to explore semester internships as online and regional options become available to our students.

Political Science will also be focusing on our off-campus learning opportunities such as the PLEN, Model United Nations and Marist College Albany Internship Programs. Cultivating student interest in these programs is a priority for the major.

Another initiative for the major is to improve our campus presence and our online “footprint”. Over the course of 2013-2014, Political Science was active in participating in multiple on-campus events including hosting Senator Gillibrand’s staff for a talk during CS&E Day in the Fall semester, hosting Dr. Mariam Raqib during Activism Symposium, hosting a talk by Dr. Muna Ndulo of Cornell University during CS&E Day in the Spring and hosting the Aurora Mayoral Debate. Our students participated in internship fair presentations in the Fall and Spring and in both the Fall (senior thesis) and Spring (POLS 230, POLS 360 and Student-Faculty Debate) CS&E Days. Also in the Fall, Political Science established a Facebook page which has over 75 “likes” that include current and former students (majors and non-majors); faculty, staff and alums. Plans for the coming year are to continue to promote programming that is of campus-wide interest and to continue to grow the Facebook presence of the major through potential student postings and current events updates.

III. Updated Assessment Plan

Political Science was instituted as a new major in 2012. It has been working from the Public Affairs assessment plan to date. Plans were originally in place to craft a new assessment plan in 2013 to be implemented with this 2014 assessment report. However, due to faculty leave and anticipated changes in guidelines from EPC regarding course-level characteristics and associated assessment, the plan has been delayed. A new POLS assessment plan will be crafted in 2014 and will be implemented with the 2015 assessment report.

IV. Summary of Data Used

Data used for this report are anecdotal recollections and experiences of faculty working with individual students 2013-2014. Faculty recorded impressions of the process, student preparedness and resulting thesis project quality, comparing them with expectations and long-range goals for improvement. Faculty also reviewed student internship experiences and evaluations and campus event participation/success.