

I. Executive Summary

The focus of assessment in Political Science for 2016-2017 has been the extent to which our courses are helping students with their civic engagement, particularly their interest in current events and their ability to understand current events using the information that we review in our courses. Given the particularly contentious nature of politics in our current environment, the ability to understand and participate in the political process is critical not only for our majors, but also for students across campus.

The results of our prioritization and assessment reports from 2015-2016 indicated a need for the major to be significantly revised. While we have been experimenting with tutorial courses over the past several years, it is clear that the major structure itself needs revision. We are currently researching best practices at other institutions and examining interest among our own students as we prepare a revised major structure to be presented in Spring 2018.

Summary of Annual Assessment Review and Planning Discussion

The Political Science Major took an active role in partnering with campus student groups in hosting debate watch parties over the course of the fall 2016 semester as a way of encouraging campus interest and civic engagement surrounding the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In addition, we continue to incorporate current events as a focus of our coursework. The debate parties were successful, attracting a large number of students from cross campus. A review of both anecdotal data regarding student interest and the results of an online survey of Spring 2017 POLS students reveals that they find our courses to be useful in spurring their interest in current events as well as supporting their ability to understand current events. Students overwhelmingly indicated that their courses helped them to make sense of current events (85% agreed strongly; 15% agreed); that their class helped expand their understanding of how politics works (60% agreed strongly; 40% agreed) and that their class helped them to understand politics from a non-partisan perspective (55% agreed strongly; 45% agreed). This data suggests that we are meeting our goal of encouraging and supporting political awareness and civic engagement.

Another way of increasing civic engagement is to increase our focus on our off-campus learning opportunities such as our Public Leadership Educational Network (PLEN) and Model United Nations (MUN). Cultivating student interest in these programs is a priority for the major. We are pleased to report sustained interest in MUN with another successful group participation at the Model United Nations Conference in New York City in Spring 2017. Moreover, we are very pleased to report that participation in the PLEN Law and Public Policy, Exploring Non-Profits and Congress seminars was at a 10-year high with 12 students participating.

Plans for Coming Year

Our plan for the coming year includes continued revision of our assessment plan, tying specific goals and objectives to measurable outcomes that we can use in our assessment review.

The summer and fall terms of 2017 will be dedicated to crafting a new major design, including the incorporation of new courses based on student interest and trends significant in the discipline.

III. Updated Assessment Plan

An updated assessment plan draft is attached. Revisions are continuing.

IV. Summary of Data Used

Data used for this report are anecdotal recollections and experiences of faculty 2016-2017 and results of an online survey of students enrolled in POLS courses in spring 2017.