

Student Learning Assessment Plan

Political Science Major

2015-2016

Written and submitted by Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo

May 27, 2016

The mission statement for the Major in Political Science is made with reference to Wells College Mission Statement (p.4, 2015-2016 Catalog) and Wells' Institutional and Academic Program Goals (pp. 9-10, 2015-2016 Catalog). The mission of Wells College guides the major in Political Science. This major's goals complement, advance, and consolidate the mission of Wells College, which is:

“To educate students to think critically, reason wisely, and act humanely as they cultivate meaningful lives. Through Wells' academic program, residential atmosphere, and community activities, students learn and practice the ideals of the liberal arts. The Wells experience prepares students to appreciate complexity and difference, to embrace new ways of knowing, to be creative, and to respond ethically to the interdependent worlds to which they belong. Committed to excellence in all areas of its reach, Wells College equips students for lifelong learning and for sharing the privileges of education with others.”

1. Mission of the Political Science Major

At the heart of the discipline of Political Science is the question of a power struggle. Thus, the major exposes students to challenging paradigms and schools of thought centered on how institutions and individual power is gained, organized, used, lost or abused. The major exposes students to the various methods, concerns, topics, and analytical issues in the basic subfields of the discipline of Political Science: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, and political theory.

In the major, students will acquire broad skills regarding the analysis of, and critical knowledge

about agencies, functions, and structures of institutions of power; the nature of political behavior; and the principles and processes of governance. It prepares students for careers in government, law, development, non-governmental organizations, educations, and research areas.

In the mission of the Political Science, learning is organized and advanced through critical thinking, critical writing, and comprehensive understanding of the power systems and their policy implications as articulated in the curriculum of the major, is the process through which the mission of the College is expanded, tested and consolidated.

2. Program Goals of the Political Science Major

- (1) Analysis – students will have the ability to recognize and utilize key concepts in political science and demonstrate relationships among them;
- (2) Synthesis – students will have the ability to connect topics across contexts and disciplines in a holistic manner that includes ethical considerations;
- (3) Communication – students will have the ability to clearly articulate ideas, relationships and information in multiple ways;
- (4) Technological competency – students will have the ability to perform research in multiple methods;
- (5) Applied learning – students will have the ability to apply their analytic, synthesis, communication and technological skills in real world settings;

3. Updates in Political Science Major Curriculum

The current structure of the Political Science Major is relatively new. We do not have any new adjustments or modifications either structurally or substantively in the curriculum. However,

with the emphasis on the above goals, we systematically have promoted and solidified, in our syllabi, the issues concerning critical thinking and writing; and also policy implications or the application of old concepts in a new digital era. Assignments on how to use the Internet as a tool of research and source of data strongly discussed at our 100 and 200 level courses.

Students in Political Science are well prepared for graduate studies and employment.

4. Learning Objectives (Outcomes That Determine Whether the Goals Have Been Achieved)

Students who meet the above goals are expected to:

1. Be able to understand the complexity of the Discipline of Political Science in its totality as well as in its subfields;
2. Be capable to use both qualitative and quantitative analytical thinking and reasoning in order to analyze political structures, decision making and policy analysis and possible or real problems that the state in relations to citizens face;
3. Be capable of critically evaluating scholarly literature and research on Political Science.
4. Be able of making a rational judgment on, and/or, about, political issues or world politics issues needed in local/national policy-making process.
5. Be able to understand the connections between Political Science and other disciplines within the context of the needs for the protection and preservation of the environmental and pluralistic cultural imperatives.

5. Measurable Learning Outcomes

Assessment of outcomes takes place through various means as stated below.

(1) Fulfillment of 22-24 semester hours: International Studies 151 (introduction to international studies); Political Science 155 (American Politics); Political Science 390 (Internship in Political Science); Political Science 401: Senior Seminar; Sociology 294 (Research Semester Methods for Social Sciences); then students take additional two courses for which one course must be at 300 level;

(2) Two required introductory courses in Political Science: International Studies 151 and Political Science 155 are the only prerequisites in most courses offered in the major. However, we also are flexible in judging the pre-requisites set up by other colleagues in the major in social sciences at large. Students have to take one course from each of the major subfields (12 sem. hrs.) Namely: American Politics; Comparative Politics; Political Theory And International Relations

(3) In each course, we assess it through the students 'mastery of literature review, methodological exposure and policy implications to solve problems;

(4) Examinations, quizzes, and homework sets demonstrate the integration of quantitative and qualitative information and data into written logic, and analytical and critical thinking skills.

(4) At 300 level courses, book reviews are required to assess student's performance in the first part of the semester before students start to work on their research projects;

(5) Writing and critical thinking as tools of assessing what is being taught: in all courses in International Studies major, students are required to conduct research projects and produce writings, essays, and/or position papers in order to demonstrate scholarly knowledge, research capability and awareness of contemporary issues in the field. Students are expected to understand the guidelines for research papers provided to them in all my course syllabi.

(6) In 300 level courses, class presentations, discussions and debates to demonstrate verbal skills and technological competence, to communicate reasoned point of view, and engage in collaborative practices in the classroom.

(7) Performance in internships: two internships are required in International Studies major. This experience is administered in all 4 years of study, freshman through senior year. The academic components of the internship comprise of a public lecture through International Colloquium Series and a writing of a paper on the experience. The student is expected to use theories to explain his/her experiences. The final assessment is based on on-site evaluation and performance and the academic performance.

(8) Comprehensive Exam: each senior is given 3 questions as part the comprehensive exam either in the fall or the semester in which she/he is a graduating. She/he has to demonstrate her/his competency in analysis of the issues related to the questions covering 3 aspects of Political Science: American Politics, Comparative Politics and International Relations;

(9) Senior Thesis Project: Each graduating senior in the major conducts an independent project under the guidance. A second reader is also one of us. In this thesis senior, student has to demonstrate his/her capacity to apply a theory or sets of theories toward an understanding of given political issue. Students must identify the relevancy of analysis within the discipline and policy implications of the thesis. This past spring we had 5 graduates among which 3 had distinction in Political Science.

(10) The outcome of this senior thesis is presented publically; According to the comments we obtain often from our students, the senior thesis is a mini graduate research project.

(11) Performance of students after graduation: job placement and graduate school placement rates should be established.

(6) Means of Assessment of Outcomes

The following will be used as standards for the assessment outcomes listed above.

- (1) Courses are letter graded as defined in the Wells Catalog from F, D- and A+; in Political Science courses I generally follow these standards.
- (2) Satisfactory or unsatisfactory within internships;
- (3) The research on senior thesis is based on original project;
- (4) This project must have the following elements:
 - (a) A clearly articulated research statement;
 - (b) A literature review;
 - (c) A methodological Guidelines; and a bibliography;
 - (d) Thesis is publically presented as a form of public defense; this oral presentation is part of Political Science Major 401, which is a required senior seminar (course).
- (5) Student makes an oral presentation on her/his senior thesis, which is public. Theories and evidence are important sources upon which this presentation is evaluated. It constitutes about 40 percent of the final grade in International Studies 401. Through this public presentation, student is given the feedback from the community on his/her senior thesis.
- (6) Comprehensive exam for graduating seniors: The performance is evaluated on analytical skills, literature review, theories and their policy implications. The grade Pass or Pass with Distinction or Fail is assigned to this exam.
- (7) In the seminar courses (300 level courses), we give also middle term exams, the finals or the final papers. The focus is on the assessment of research abilities and policy-making recommendations;
- (8) In political science B or B+ is a very good grade. About 60 percent of students who take our courses get B or B+ grades; and about 25 percent get C, C- or C+. And about 5 percent of

students get between D and F. The most distinguished student gets between A or A-. It represents about 10 percent of the final grades. We rarely give A+.

(7) How Assessment Data Will Be Utilized

The assessment data will be used to plan for identifying further the students' needs about learning and where the performance in each area or discipline should be improved. The faculty intends to evaluate the strengths and the weaknesses of each area, the quality of knowledge transmitted and research projects advanced within the required courses of the major as tools which can improve student's quality of learning.

Thus, all the devices used in this assessment such as the quality of senior thesis and the nature of the knowledge it produces, comprehensive exam, public presentations, the internship, analytical works in seminars, debates and exams should prepare a student for professional employment.

Another device that should be used to assess over all student's performance is student's transcript in academic comparative standards. Based on the transcripts we can have some a sense of how well students are prepared for graduate schools.

Although there are no causal-relations between student's academic performance and professional performance, but in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, we believe that student's success in the quality of his/her academic performance will have an impact in her/his professional performance, especially in judgment, critical thinking, decision making and innovation areas.

Most of our graduates attend graduate schools either at the level of MA, Ph.D. in Political Science, or at level of Masters in Law. Indeed, they are well prepared at Wells College.