

Assessment Report 2009-2010
Public Affairs
January 15, 2010

1. Executive summary:

The Public Affairs major utilized a process of individual instructor initiatives and group discussion to integrate assessment measures into our practice. As a group, we reported results of our initiatives (as required in our 2008-2009 report) and discussed implications of our efforts in light of the fact that the Public Affairs major is dissolving. We noted that there will continue to be a close relationship between the majors of Political Science and Philosophy and that our interest in maintaining substantive relevance vis-à-vis one another makes it important that content specific knowledge translate across the disciplines. Results of our year-end assessment discussion indicate that substantive content areas within courses are generally faring-well and students report utilizing major specific information across courses. We also came to the conclusion that students continue to need support in terms basic writing skills and that our implementation of a writing assessment at major declaration time is a good way to assess and improve writing competency. This assessment continues to require refinement and will continue in the separate majors as they go forward. Comprehensive exams will continue in their revised written form with an update for substantive and contemporary relevancy. An effort has been made over the course of the year to guide enrollment in required courses. Given the dissolution of the major, we did not address the reasoning requirement referenced in previous discussions.

2. Summary of annual assessment review and planning meeting:

Professors. Lumumba-Kasongo, Purdy and Tabrizi discussed assessing the Public Affairs major via email during the week of January 11, 2010. We agreed that this would be a summary inquiry given that Public Affairs will be deleted from the curriculum as soon as currently enrolled majors have completed the program.

Plan for upcoming year

- a. We continue to be concerned about students' writing skills and will maintain our policy of asking declaring students to submit a writing sample. Professor Purdy read and evaluated papers for declaring majors over the 2008-2009 year. As before, the practice was, and will continue to be to ask students submitting papers that earned below a B grade to consult the Writing Center and to take at least one writing intensive course (emphasizing basic skills).
- b. Advising work emphasized taking required courses "in order" and as a priority so that students were not lacking in required work at the end of their time at

Wells. We will continue to attend to this issue as the students in the existing major complete their requirements, noting that transfer students are a particular difficulty when they come in already “behind schedule”.

- c. The revised Comprehensive Examination format was successful in focusing on application of skills and substantive content to contemporary and novel problems. The 2010 Comprehensive Examination will continue the new format with an update for substantive relevancy.
- d. As indicated in our 2008-2009 report, we discussed examples of assessment measures for particular courses, emphasizing those that will continue to exist once Public Affairs has been deleted. Examples of strategies individual instructors have employed include:
 - Book reviews in 300 level courses as a way of exposing students to authors other than those listed on the syllabi. This assignment is generally intended to help students increase the level of knowledge methodologically and theoretically in the areas related to their majors. This is reiterated and assessed as seniors are required to write elaborate literature reviews before starting the actual process of thesis writing.
 - Debate exercises with a presenter and a discussant to allow students to challenge one another based on the content of an assigned book chapter. This exercise is generally intended to test students’ understanding of the arguments and intellectual positions advanced in the texts.
 - Short papers at the beginning of a course, to identify students with writing issues and as a point of comparison with papers that are assigned as the course progresses
 - Papers that “build” upon each other in terms of topic and argumentation to track the development of argumentation over the course of the semester
 - “First day” quiz compared with “last day” quiz to compare students’ comprehension and retention of core concepts covered in a course.

5. Updated assessment plan (See attached document below)

6. Data summary

Data came from informal instructor/advisor reporting, grade-sheets from courses, course syllabi, and informal assessment of current seniors’ achievement in PUBL 401.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAJOR: STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

January 2010 (updates highlighted in red)

1. PUBLIC AFFAIRS MISSION STATEMENT

The Public Affairs major seeks to produce well-informed graduates who are capable of organizing their knowledge into sound arguments for moral public policies. The major focuses primarily but not exclusively on the U.S. environment. Its graduates will be prepared to undertake further graduate studies in areas relevant to policy (such as political science, social work, philosophy, or law), beginning level careers in government, and to be responsible and involved citizens.

2. GOALS OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAJOR

The Public Affairs Major encourages students to think critically and constructively about contemporary social issues.

Students in the Public Affairs Major:

- A. acquire a foundation informed by both Philosophy and Political Science to support the analysis of social problems and possible solutions
- B. incorporate theories, knowledge, social analysis, and moral reasoning in the examination of social issues
- C. gain an understanding of the governmental role in developing public policy
- D. learn about women's roles in social issues and public policy by the incorporation of research on women and politics, and feminist scholarship in Public Affairs courses

3. STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES (SLOs)

- A. Acquire and assess information about social problems from a variety of sources
- B. Using knowledge about politics and governmental processes to address social problems
- C. Analyze social problems using critical thinking and moral reasoning
- D. Demonstrate knowledge of the role of the U.S. Constitution and the federal system in public policy
- E. Construct and present persuasive arguments about social problems and possible solutions
- F. Demonstrate ability to write clearly and grammatically

4. PUBLIC AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT GOALS AND THE MISSION OF WELLS COLLEGE

| Goals of Mission Statement | Goals of Public Affairs |
|--|---|
| think critically and reason wisely | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on developing critical perspectives. • argumentation in written work that demonstrates reasoning skills and logical analysis. |
| act humanely and respond ethically | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis in course work on moral and legal problems raised by contemporary social and political conditions • focus on social practices and policy issues |
| appreciate complexity and difference | study an array of philosophical and political ideas/thoughts and issues |
| embrace new ways of knowing and creativity | senior thesis projects draw from diverse perspectives and sources and encourage creative problem-solving and analysis |

5. OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES (SLOs)

A: Acquire and assess information about social problems from a variety of sources

| HOW STUDENTS MEET THIS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME | EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING | WHEN STUDENT LEARNING IS ASSESSED |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Students will incorporate material acquired from both mainstream and non-mainstream sources. 2. Information literacy skills, using both traditional and online skills for library research. | 1a. Bibliographies and citations that draw on wide range of sources and in proper form. 1b. Use of scholarly resources for the analysis of policy issues and solutions. 2a. Demonstrations of the ability to assess sources for reliability. 2b. An annotated bibliography that demonstrates knowledge of scholarly skills | 1a. Continuous – all written assignments. 1b. Senior thesis – usually in the spring semester. 2a. Continuous – all written assignments. 2b. Completed as part of the proposal for the senior theses. |

B. Analyze social problems using critical thinking and moral reasoning

| HOW STUDENTS MEET THIS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME | EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING | WHEN STUDENT LEARNING IS ASSESSED |
|---|---|--|
| <p>3. Demonstrate the ability to practice critical thinking.</p> <p>2. Complete a required course in ethics.</p> <p>3. Complete a required course in logic and critical thinking.</p> | <p>1a. All written work for courses at the 300 level in the major field are evaluated for analytic strength.</p> <p>2. An essay that demonstrates the ability to develop a thesis about a social problem that builds on a set of premises to form a logically bound conclusion.</p> <p>3. Proposed: completion of an objective test of reasoning ability at the time of declaring the major and then again as part of the Comprehensive Exam (2010 – not addressed due to emphasis on writing and anticipated dissolution of major)</p> | <p>1. Duration of 300 level coursework.</p> <p>2. Successful completion of PHIL 240 (with a grade of at least B) before the beginning of the junior year, or as soon as possible for transfer students. A grade of B represents a good ability to develop a moral argument, taking account of objections, and integrating relevant facts.</p> <p>3a. Successful completion of PHIL 114 (with a grade of at least B) by the end of the junior year, at the latest. A grade of B represents the ability to recognize fallacious reasoning and grasp the logical relations between claims.</p> <p>3b. During remaining coursework and the last semester of the senior year.</p> |

C. Use knowledge about politics and governmental processes to address social problems

| HOW STUDENTS MEET THIS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME | EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING | WHEN STUDENT LEARNING IS ASSESSED |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. Demonstrate knowledge of the major characteristics of the U.S. political system, such as the separation of powers, federalism, and the electoral process.</p> <p>2. Incorporate relevant information about governmental processes and agencies in arguments developed about social problems.</p> | <p>1. Successful completion of POLS 165.</p> <p>2a. All students who major in Public Affairs develop a legislative history, which examines the proposal, development, and passage of laws in Congress.</p> <p>2b. Senior theses in Public Affairs will include a discussion of relevant governmental, actors, and decisions.</p> | <p>1. No later than the end of the sophomore year; or, for transfer students, by transfer credit.</p> <p>2a. Completion of POLS 235 (with a grade of at least B) no later than spring of the junior year. A grade of B represents a good grasp of how Congress works, especially with respect to policy formation.</p> <p>2b. Completion of the senior thesis in the spring of the senior year.</p> |

D. Demonstrate knowledge of the role of the U.S. Constitution and federal system in public policy

| HOW STUDENTS MEET THIS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME | EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING | WHEN STUDENT LEARNING IS ASSESSED |
|--|--|--|
| <p>1. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the judicial system in public policy.</p> <p>2. Demonstrate familiarity with the Supreme Court's determination of the constitutionality of laws and governmental actions.</p> <p>3. Demonstrate familiarity with the Constitution and public policy through internships.</p> | <p>1a. Successful completion of POLS 165 with at least a B. A grade of B represents a good grasp of the principles of political science and how the U.S. government works, particularly the judiciary. Students with a particular interest in this area can go on to the elective course POLS 360.</p> <p>2. Students enrolled in PHIL 310 will learn to morally evaluate a court opinion bearing on a policy issue.</p> | <p>2. No later than the end of the sophomore year; or, for transfer students, by transfer credit.</p> <p>2. Completion of PHIL 310 (with at least a B) no later than spring of the junior year. A grade of B represents the ability to formulate an argument (as in PHIL 240), and show some understanding of relevant legal issues.</p> |

E. Construct and present persuasive arguments about social problems

| HOW STUDENTS MEET THIS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME | EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING | WHEN STUDENT LEARNING IS ASSESSED |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Students will demonstrate their ability to meet E in their senior year, as part of the capstone experience, which is constituted by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation in the Public Affairs Senior Seminar (PUBL401) 2. Enrollment in the Public Affairs Thesis (PUBL 402) 3. Comprehensive Exam | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1a. Students will engage in study of a broad theme or topic that pulls together prior learning 1b. Students will produce a 15 page paper on a related issue or the topic of their choice; it will have a well-developed thesis statement and argument for a new policy or change in an existing policy in the U.S. 2a. Completed senior thesis project with a well-developed thesis and argument., based on 1b. Length: 25-50 pages, depending on credit earned. Thesis will have clear introductory section, support for thesis statement, and conclusion based on evidence presented. Thesis will be clear and grammatical, good transitions between sections and paragraphs, and well organized paragraphs focused on one main idea. 2b. A public presentation of the senior thesis. Students will lay out their thesis statement and provide a brief summary of their argument and conclusion* Added 2009 is a presentation of thesis design and research plan. 3. Successful completion of Comprehensive Examination; | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completed in the fall semester of the senior year. 2. Completed in the spring semester of the senior year. 3. Completed at the end of the spring semester of the senior year. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>this is an oral examination on a set of questions distributed in the fall semester and may include followup questions about their theses. <i>2009: change in format, to written; questions completely revamped.</i></p> <p><i>Format change for 2009 successful. Questions for 2010 include substantive update.</i></p> | |
|--|--|--|

F. Demonstrate ability to write clearly and grammatically

| How students meet this student learning outcome | Evidence of student learning | When student learning is assessed |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1. Students will hand in their best paper to date when they declare the major.</p> | <p>1. If writing needs significant improvement, faculty will return paper with the requirement to consult with the Writing Center to improve it</p> | <p>1. Revised paper will be handed in to faculty in May of junior year; if it could not earn a B, it will be returned to student for additional work over the summer, and handed in again at the beginning of the fall of the junior year.*Professor Purdy reviewed writing samples for declaring majors in 2009.</p> <p>2. Papers in all major courses will be assessed for writing; expected level is B.</p> |

6. HOW ASSESSMENT MATERIALS WILL BE GATHERED

A. Examples of A, B, and C level course work will be gathered electronically and stored in relevant course file folders. *(Not done 2009 or 2010)*

B. Records will be kept of scores on reasoning tests and for PHIL 114 *(2009 and 2010: Reasoning test not implemented—writing assessment seems more urgent, in light of senior performance)*

C. Hard/electronic copies of all theses will be collected and stored *(Yes – electronic copies of research proposals and design added 2009-2010.)*

7. HOW ASSESSMENT INFORMATION WILL BE USED TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING

On an annual basis, the Public Affairs faculty will meet to review student learning in the major. In addition to reviewing the indicators of student learning, faculty will review representative student work, including written work, student web pages, and portfolios, and discuss with students their experience as learners in the Public Affairs Major. The information gathered will be used to improve student learning by:

- A. refining student learning outcomes
- B. assessing and revising course materials
- C. identifying and sharing successful instructional strategies
- D. revising major requirements
- E. providing new guidelines for senior theses

Submitted by:
Susan Tabrizi, PhD
Assistant Professor of Political Science
January 2010