

New Mexico State University

Detailed Assessment Report 2015 - 2016 Government Undergraduate

As of: 12/02/2016 11:50 AM MDT

(Includes those Action Plans with Budget Amounts marked **One-Time, Recurring, No Request**)

Mission / Purpose

The mission of the Department of Government is to produce and impart knowledge and skills necessary for understanding political structures, political issues and participating in public affairs. The BA in Government supports this mission through undergraduate instruction in general political science and each of the subfields of political science. The BA in Government program supports the Land-Grant mission of NMSU by serving the people of New Mexico through teaching, scholarship, service and outreach. As dictated by our land grant mission, the department serves a diverse community students from across the state, and increasingly from across the country and the world. Through our teaching we aim to enable our students to become productive citizens and leaders. Through our scholarship we hope to assessment and information about important political events and public policies. Through our service and outreach we share our knowledge and expertise with our students and the greater community. In furtherance of our department mission, the department has particularly focused to develop its expertise on border-related issues, on Native American public policy and research and on the issues facing indigenous and migrating communities. As appropriate to a land grant mission we have shared that expertise through the development of conferences, colloquia and student learning opportunities.

Goals/Objectives

G 1: Educate students in skills necessary for understanding political affairs

1. Provide curriculum to impart knowledge and skills in political science, including each of the six-fields (American Government, Public Administration Policy, International Relations, Comparative Politics, Political Theory and Public Law

G 2: Students will gain new knowledge and expertise in the field and in discipline specific subfields.

2. Students will be provided the opportunity to gain new knowledge of the field generally and to develop particular facility with specific sub-field disciplines.

G 3: Students will demonstrate the ability to impart knowledge to others

The department intends to develop students' political science/ government knowledge base and their ability to communicate that knowledge base in an articulate fashion. Students will be provided the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge through participation in a Senior Seminar and through the use of a written assessment at the completion of the course.

Student Learning Outcomes, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

S 1: Ability of students to communicate key ideas in political science

1. This evaluation will take place at the end of the semester in the form of a written exam. By the conclusion of Senior Seminar (and as students near completion of their Department of Government undergraduate degree), students should be able to: A) demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a department sub-field; B) craft a critical essay targeted at an informed, academic audience; and C) identify key actors, major institutions and processes, and significant events - or identify major theories, theorists, and historic controversies in the field of Government.

Relevant Associations:

1. Senior Seminar has been structured to be a culminating experience for department majors before they graduate. We also hope to utilize senior seminar to show us, as faculty, where students are weakest and strongest, from a departmental perspective. Senior Seminar addresses the abilities of graduating students. Recognizing that not all students get to this point, the department has undertaken efforts to promote early engagement with underclassmen. This includes the development of an introductory seminar (Govt 101), mandatory faculty advising and encouraging faculty to utilize new campus initiatives such as the navigators and quick connect programs. The Government 101 class in particular is an effort to work with students early in their academic experience to hone the student skills necessary to succeed in the department. Govt 101 is not a substantive knowledge class and we do not anticipate collecting data or establishing benchmarks in that class. Instead, we have used that class and other activities to engage and encourage students and promote student retention.

General Education / State Common Core Associations

1 Area 1: Communication

- 1.1 Analyze and evaluate oral and written communication in terms of situation, audience, purpose, aesthetics, and diverse points of view.
- 1.2 Express a primary purpose in a compelling statement and order supporting points logically and convincingly.
- 1.3 Use effective rhetorical strategies to persuade, inform and engage.
- 1.4 Employ writing and/or speaking processes such as planning, collaborating, organizing, composing, revising & editing to create presentations using correct diction, syntax, grammar and mechanics.
- 1.5 Integrate research correctly and ethically from credible sources to support the primary purpose of a communication.
- 1.6 Engage in reasoned civil discourse while recognizing the distinctions among opinions, facts, and inferences.

4 Area IV: Social & Behavioral Science

- 4.1 Identify, describe, and explain human behaviors and how they are influenced by social structures, institutions, and processes within the contexts of complex and diverse communities.
- 4.2 Articulate how beliefs, assumptions, and values are influenced by factors such as politics, geography, economics, culture, biology, history, and social institutions.
- 4.3 Describe ongoing reciprocal interactions among self, society, and the environment.
- 4.4 Apply the knowledge base of the social and behavioral sciences to identify, describe, explain, and critically evaluate relevant issues, ethical dilemmas, and arguments.

Baccalaureate Experience Learning Objectives Associations

- 1 Academically Prepared - Students have discipline-specific and broad general education knowledge and are intellectually prepared for entry into a professional field and/or graduate studies.
- 7 Citizenship - Students have a personal commitment to, and actively and frequently engage in activities that advance societal needs for social justice, sustainability and global perspective.

Strategic Plan Associations

Arts and Sciences College

- 1.1 Goal 1: Provide students with a high quality education in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences, at the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral levels.

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- 1.1.4 (1D) Promote timely degree completion through a supportive environment
 - 1.1.4.1 (1D.1) Colleges will provide streamlined completion paths for each degree program
 - 1.1.4.2 (1D.2) Colleges will implement aggressive intervention programs to enhance student success with VP Student Affairs assistance
 - 1.1.4.3 (1D.3) Colleges will encourage faculty to identify at-risk students and utilize early interventions
 - 1.1.4.4 (1D.4) Colleges will evaluate faculty mentoring and advising annually

Related Measures

M 1: Writing sample from Senior Seminar

1. Within the context of a final exam students will be asked to write a short essay on a chosen departmental sub-field. The exam will occur at the end of our capstone class, Govt 415 Senior Seminar in Government. Final exam essays will be assessed by department faculty using the PRIOS rubric adopted by the department(see attached rubric). The essay will be evaluated to examine both substantive knowledge and written communication/ articulation ability. In the Spring of 2016, undergraduate committee members have also addressed how to assess those students who do not get assessed in the course of Govt 415. Every semester the department grants waivers to students who are unable to take Govt 415. The undergraduate committee has developed standards and requirements for waivers to include the taking of the written assessment.

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

Target:

75% of students or more will receive a composite score of Meets or Exceeds Expectations on the basis of their writing samples

Finding (2015 - 2016) - Target: Met

Fourteen students took the assessment and all fourteen met or exceeded expectations. On a three point scale where 1 does not meet expectations, 2 meets expectations and 3 exceeds expectations, the average score was 2.35. The high score (averaged between two faculty scores) was 2.89 and the low score was 2.02. One hundred percent of students taking the exam met expectations and thus, the target was met.

Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)

Faculty will seek to address student shortcomings

In grading assessments and in reviewing assessment results, faculty agreed that students were least proficient in discussing research and research methods in the field. All professors in the department agreed to try to include additional discussions and greater focus on research and research applications into their classes. Faculty agreed that they should continue to emphasize research applications and faculty should continue to develop critical thinking and writing skills in the classroom. At the completion of the 2015-2016 assessment, the undergraduate faculty recommended that the department try to standardize the administration of assessments so as to increase the validity of measurement comparisons.

Established in Cycle: 2014 - 2015

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Implementation Description: Faculty will emphasize critical thinking skills and ability to draw on relevant material to support points made in presentations. Faculty should continue to emphasize research applications.

Projected Completion Date: 05/2016

Responsible Person/Group: Prof. Seckler and Undergraduate Faculty

Plan to address areas for improvement in student writing

1. Based on our findings, we will identify areas of writing that require improvement and implement steps to address this goal

Established in Cycle: 2014 - 2015

Implementation Status: Planned

Priority: High

Implementation Description: In Spring 2015, the members of the undergraduate committee will each assess the student writing samples collected from the Senior Seminar in Fall 2014, using the PRIOS rubric adapted to the needs of the BA in Government. We will then meet to discuss our findings and identify areas for improvement and the steps to address this goal.

Projected Completion Date: 05/2014

Responsible Person/Group: Professors Seckler, Harvey, Conner, Liang and Corbett

Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

1. Engagement: How did you engage faculty, administrators, staff, students and/or other stakeholders in discussing results of the assessment and determining the effectiveness of the assessment in measuring the identified outcome(s)? Include meeting dates, topics of discussions, audience and any decisions made.

The results of the 2015-2016 assessment were discussed at multiple meetings of faculty. The results were not available until July 2016 so discussions were held at the department's undergraduate committee meeting on Aug 29, 2016 and at the department of government general faculty meeting on August 31. Topics discussed included both the administration and results of the assessments. With regard to the administration of the assessment, the consensus of the undergraduate committee was that more care be taken to standardize the implementation of the assessment. Prior assessments had been done in the classroom while this year's assessment was administered in a take home fashion. In order to compare

the results, the committee thought it important to standardize the administration of the assessment. Additionally, in prior years more undergraduate faculty had participated in scoring but due to the collection of the results in summer fewer faculty were available. The decision was made to try to remedy these concerns. With regard to the results of the assessment, the department met its target but faculty agreed that continued efforts emphasizing the role of research was important.

2. Impact: Discuss the impact of your assessment. Does the data collected answer the question you had about the intended outcome? If not, why? Did you learn anything about the intended outcome you did not anticipate? If so, what? Did the assessment provide sufficient information about the outcome that you can now make informed decisions about programs/practices or specific, directed improvements to programs/practices?

The data collected answered some of our questions. Our intended outcome is for students to be able to communicate key ideas in political science. While our students have demonstrated that ability the faculty recognize room for improvement. We continue to work on students understanding of how knowledge in the field is developed. The use of the assessment findings has prompted us to offer our research methods class more often, a move that has resulted in a direct improvement to the program.

3. What specifically did your assessment show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives? (Strengths)

Our assessment showed that our students are improving. More subtly, the assessment revealed that our students perform better on the assessment when they participate in a senior seminar class conducted in a more traditional seminar format prior to the administration of the assessment. Our students have taken the assessment 3 times, once following a traditional seminar format and twice after a large classroom experience. The students in the seminar who had participated in material reviews outperformed students in the larger classes. The results also show that our efforts at increased exposure and connections to research have helped the understanding of our students. Perhaps the greatest strength is not the actual administration of the assessment. Rather, it is the meeting of faculty to discuss student performance and improved teaching practices.

4. What specifically did your assessment show regarding opportunities for improvement. Describe how you intend to address those issues over the next year. If you met all targets, what specifically do you intend to do in the next assessment cycle to promote continuous improvement in your area?

A detailed examination of our assessment scores showed a disparity in achievement levels. While all students passed and we met our target, over one-third of students barely scraped by earning 2.2 or below on a 3 point scale (where 2 is adequate). In reading the assessments it is clear that while all students possessed the requisite knowledge, some still need help formulating concise summaries and explanations of the big ideas in the study of government. A review of the assessment and findings also brought in to question the need to standardize exam administration. Our writing assessment is administered in a senior class. As different professors have taught the class, different levels of exam administration have been used. The undergraduate committee recommended the standardization of the exam administration to better enable faculty to compare scores and increase the validity of the comparison. Finally, in years past, most members of the department had participated in the senior class. In the last year fewer faculty participated and the faculty as a whole thought this was a bad trend. A varied faculty presence in the senior seminar classroom benefits students and faculty alike.

5. Specifically, what have you learned about your program, and/or your students' learning?

We learned that we have strong students and we have weak students. Regardless of where students fall on that scale, we learned that all our students benefit from a review of their prior study. We also recognize that the presence of a variety of faculty members in the senior classroom is valuable to students (and faculty). We learned that while we continue to push awareness of research and research methods in the field, our students are weaker in this area. That said, many of our faculty have incorporated changes in the classroom to address these shortcomings and students are improving. We also theorize that our expanded course schedule to offer research methods every semester has helped. We also have learned that students continue to have trouble formulating big picture explanations and there is a continued need to develop critical thinking skills in the classroom.

6. Provide a brief summary of your program, department, or unit's activities in the current assessment cycle. You might want to describe a major accomplishment or explain how your area contributed to Baccalaureate Experience learning, or to Vision 2020. Alternatively you may want to discuss how your program is using this assessment to inform decisions and actions for improvement. This summary should be appropriate for broad audiences.

Our department assessment cycle is variable as the administration of our assessment is tied to the offering of our senior seminar course. In the 2016-2017 academic year we anticipate offering that class only once in the Spring of 2017. In that class the writing assessment will be administered in mid-Spring 2017. This will be our 4th year of participating in the written assessment and we have learned a number of important things from reviewing prior data. This increased knowledge has pushed us to increase the number of research methods classes taught in the department and has led to changes in the way that class is taught. Additionally, the knowledge gained has led several professors to present topics in a different fashion - or with a different focus - with the intent of providing a more big picture/long term view of the field. While we have considered the results of these assessments and used that information to make decisions, we have not always had the luxury of being able to fully adopt our findings. Reduced numbers of faculty and the reduced ability to offer classes with small numbers of students has impacted our ability to respond. The development of an undergraduate assessment regime has forced us to formalize plans and take action to measure student achievement. A concomitant effect has been the regular meeting of the undergraduate committee to discuss assessment and the necessity of faculty from multiple department sub-fields to be present in the senior classroom. The value of these activities may be even more than the generation of assessment numbers. In the undergraduate committee, in particular, we have had many and good discussions about better ways to teach our students, about teaching methods and goals and about student needs. These are invaluable discussions and revelations that will never find their way into an assessment software box.