

HENDRIX COLLEGE – DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

2022-2023 Departmental Learning Goals Assessment

This year, the Department of Politics assessed Departmental Learning Goals 5 and 6. We used a variety of instruments, both direct and indirect, to provide the data. These will be detailed below. The report is organized by Learning Goal: Section I covers LG 6; Section II covers LG 6, and Section III provides conclusions about the assessment process, insofar as we have completed our three-year SAP cycle.

Learning Goal 5: [Students] demonstrate enhanced oral and written communication skills.
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I.A Direct Data

I.A.1. Instructors' Evaluation of Student Performance: Course Rubrics

As with most majors in the Social Sciences, Politics emphasizes the development of writing and oral/verbal skills. This year we chose to directly assess ten courses, covering the entire range of our curriculum, from POLI 100 (our topical introductory course) to POLI 497 (our Senior Research Seminar) and including courses in all our subfields. After each course is completed, instructors assess the students using a rubric based on their particular assignments and other course elements.

The courses we used for the assessment of Learning Goal 5 were:

- Four POLI 100 sections: two on “The Cold War” (Edquist-Whelan) and one each of “Civil Society” (Shanks) and “Corruption” (Maslin). These courses are introductory and at least one section is required of majors and minors. In each section we typically set aside 75% of the seats for first-year students; the remaining 25% are typically filled with sophomores and juniors, with an occasional senior (often from another major, often from the Natural Sciences and Humanities).
- Five 200/300 level courses, covering American/Public Policy, Theory, and Comparative/International Relations.
 - POLI 235 *Public Policy* (Shanks)
 - POLI 245 *American Political Thought* (Maslin)
 - POLI 250 *History of the International System* (Edquist-Whelan)
 - POLI 283/383 *Model UN/Model UN Mentoring* (this is a combined course) (Edquist-Whelan)
- POLI 497 *Senior Research Seminar* (Maslin)

The full results of this assessment are in Table 1, on the following page. This will be followed by analysis and discussion.

Table 1. Learning Goal 5 Direct Course assessment

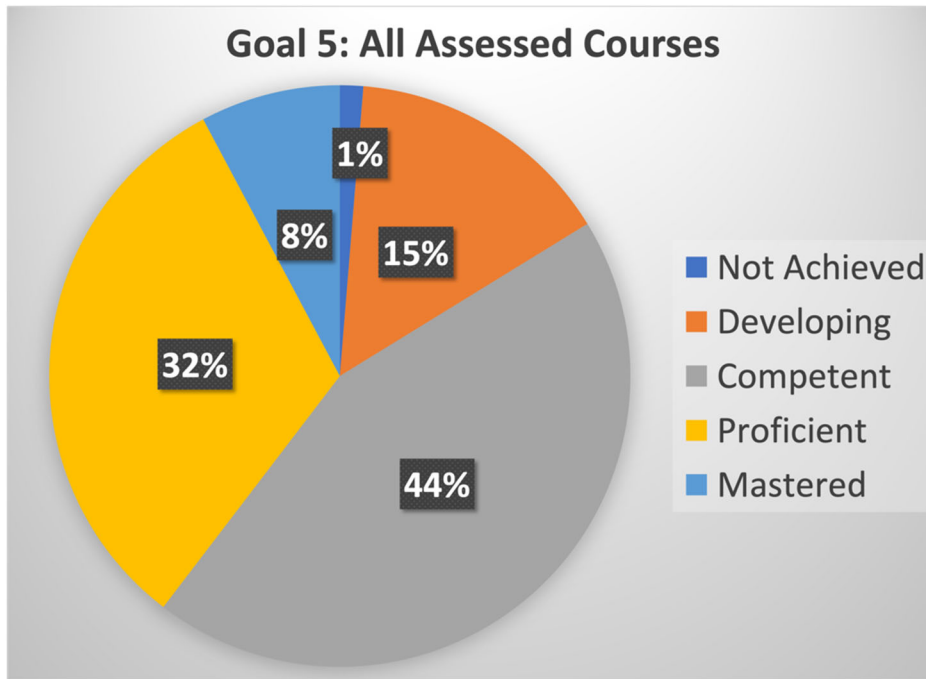
Goal 5: Demonstrate enhanced written and oral communication skills

		I Not Achieved	II Developing	III Competent	IV Proficient	
Course	Evidence Used	<p><u>Written</u>: Little ability to effectively communicate basic ideas in writing.</p> <p><u>Oral</u>: Unwillingness to contribute to classroom discussions and/or poor presentation skills.</p>	<p><u>Written</u>: Some progress made in writing effectiveness/clarity but more improvement is required.</p> <p><u>Oral</u>: some progress in effectively contributing to classroom discussions and/or making presentations.</p>	<p><u>Written</u>: Basic effectiveness in writing, but not always consistently or to the extent expected.</p> <p><u>Oral</u>: general willingness to and effectiveness in classroom discussions and/or making presentations.</p>	<p><u>Written</u>: Consistently meets expectations set by department (achieves goal). Can clearly articulate ideas in writing, both descriptively and analytically.</p> <p><u>Oral</u>: consistently demonstrates willingness and proficiency in classroom discussions and/or making presentations.</p>	Advanced major skills at a level graduate-level
POLI 100 (1S Edquist-Whelan)	Writing assignments; research project (lit review); in-class engagement	1	2	7	7	
POLI 100 (2S Edquist-Whelan)	Writing assignments; research project (lit review); in-class engagement	0	2	5	6	
POLI 100 (1S Shanks)	Writing assignments and simulations	0	3	10	4	
POLI 100 (2S Maslin)	Writing assignments and in-class essays	1	7	13	0	
POLI 235 (1S Shanks)	Writing assignments and in-class engagement	0	2	10	6	
POLI 245 (2S Maslin)	Exams; writing assignments	0	7	11	3	
POLI 250 (2S Edquist-Whelan)	Writing assignments; research project; in-class engagement	0	0	4	7	
POLI 283/383 (1S Edquist-Whelan)	Three conference papers; in-class simulations (speeches); AMUN Conference work	0	0	5	13	
POLI 497 (1S Maslin)	Thesis work (writing); in-class presentations; peer feedback	0	0	3	3	
Totals		2	23	68	49	
Percentages		1%	15%	44%	32%	
POLI 100s (Totals)		2	14	35	17	
Percentages		3%	19%	49%	24%	
POLI 200-300 (Totals)		0	9	30	29	
Percentages		0%	12%	41%	39%	

I.A.2. Analysis

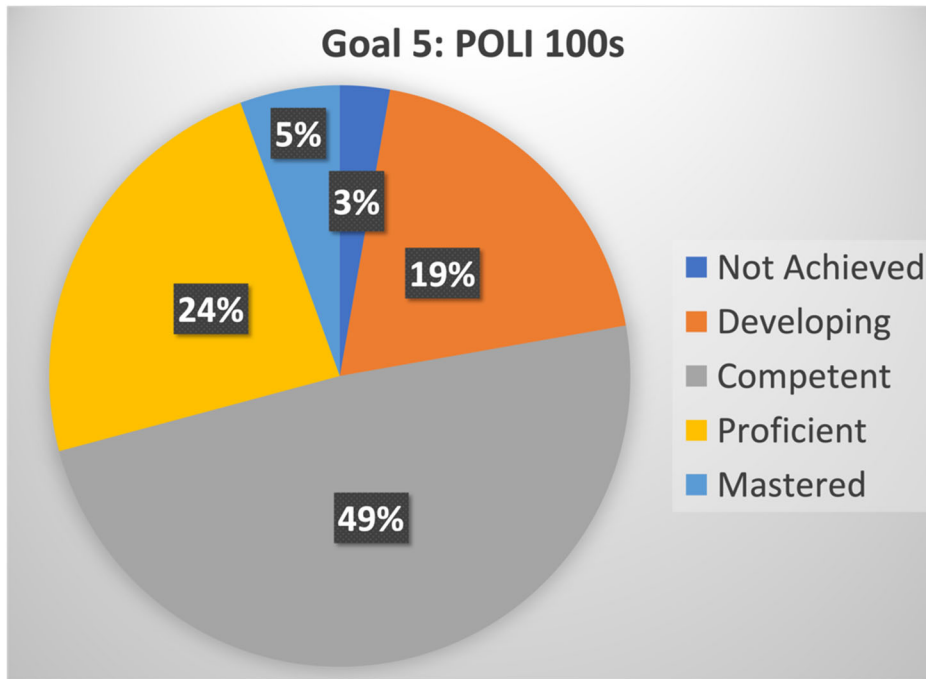
This is a robust dataset in terms of the number of students assessed (154). The results for all assessed courses are in the graph below. The level of “proficient” is our departmental goal; 40% of our students have met (32%) or exceeded (8%) this goal. A plurality – 44% – have only achieved the level of “competent” and 15% are “developing.” Only one percent have not achieved the goal.

Graph 1. Learning Goal 5 Rubrics – All courses



Let's now look at the same data, comparing POLI 100 students with those assessed at the 200-300 levels (not including POLI 497). These results are in the two graphs below, starting with the POLI 100 results.

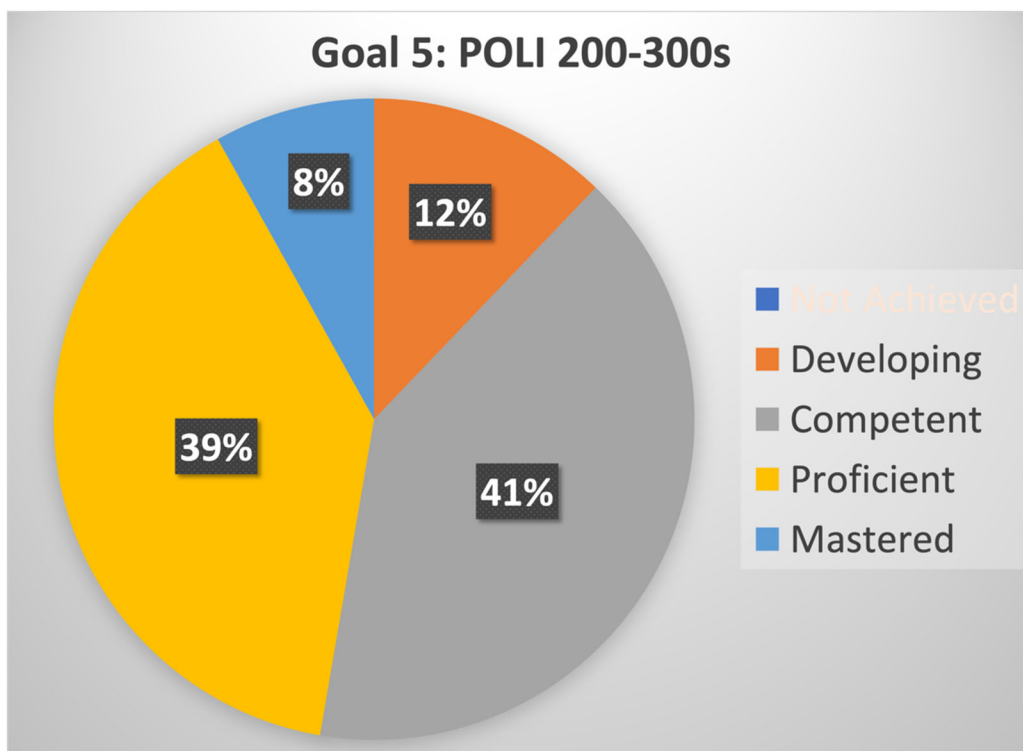
Graph 2. Learning Goal 5 – POLI 100 Sections (N=72)



Here we see that 3% have not achieved the goal; nearly 20% are “developing” and nearly half are at a level of competency. Nearly 30% have met or exceeded the goal. It is quite likely that the 5% who have achieved mastery are upper division Hendrix students. It is very discouraging that more than 20% of this cohort is below the level of competency.

We see some much better numbers at the 200-300 level in the graph below. The lion’s share of this cohort of courses is at the 200-level; the 300-level is represented only by the very small number of students (six) who were enrolled as mentors in POLI 383.

Graph 3. Learning Goal 5 – 200-300 level courses (N=74)



In this group, there were no students who did not achieve the goal at all. Nearly half (48%) met or exceeded the department standard of “proficiency.” However, more than half (52%) were “developing” or “competent.” If we dig into the individual course data, we see that about half of the students in Maslin’s and Shanks’ courses were “competent,” with smaller numbers at “developing” (larger for Maslin’s course) or “proficient.” Edquist-Whelan’s two courses had no students at “developing” and far more at the level of proficiency (but about the same at mastery). These differences may be due to the nature of those courses (Model UN in particular is *very* writing intensive – the students must write three significant conference-related papers and are engaged in resolution drafting throughout the semester), the structure of writing assignments, or the number of juniors and seniors in those courses (at least half of the students in POLI 250 this Spring were juniors or seniors).

We will discuss the direct evidence from POLI 497 in Section I.C (Discussion and Recommendations), below. We will now turn to our indirect data for Learning Goal 5.

I.B. Indirect Data

I.B.1 W2-related questions on Student Feedback Surveys

POLI 245 American Political Thought (Maslin) and POLI 250 *History of the International System* (Edquist-Whelan) are coded for W2. As such, there were W2-related questions on the Course Feedback Surveys. The number of observations is small insofar as not everyone enrolled in these courses sought the W2 credit. Scores are along the five-point Likert Scale (1=“strongly disagree”, to 5=“strongly agree”). The results are in Table 2.

Table 2. W2-related questions from student feedback forms for POLI 245 and POLI 250

Question (“This course has...”)	Scores (5-point scale)	
	POLI 245 (N=5)	POLI 250 (N=7)
Enhanced my ability to write fluent and logical short papers	4.6	4.29
Improved my ability to write a thesis statement, develop it, and bring it to a conclusion	4.2	4.29
Improved my grammatical correctness/correct my own errors	4.0	4.33
Improved my diction, vocabulary, and sentence structure	4.2	4.14

Note: Only some students (presumably those who took these courses for W2) responded to these questions. POLI 245 had 21 students; POLI 250 had 13 students.

It appears that, at least for the students who answered these questions, the courses were highly effective in meeting the learning goals for the W2. What we cannot know is whether the students completing the questions map closely with the students who were scored as “proficient” or “mastery” in our own direct observations. We might speculate that they do, however, insofar as students tend to take their W2 in a course in their own major.

I.B.2. Senior Exit Survey (N=6)

Every year we encourage our seniors to complete a very comprehensive exit survey instrument that asks a variety of questions about the senior research experience, as well as their skills development, engaged learning opportunities, structure of the major, and their overall experience in the Department. We tend to get high response rates (this year it was 75%) on this survey.

We ask a general question about their assessment of how well the department aided in the development of a variety of skills: analytical; research/methodology; critical thinking; writing; and oral/verbal. Students give each question a score based on a five-point scale (1 = “almost nothing” to 5 = “immensely”). Table 3 includes this year’s scores on Writing and Oral/Verbal skills as well as the data from previous three years.

Table 3. Senior Exit Survey Responses (5-point scale)

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Writing	4.67	4.30	4.78	4.67
Oral/Verbal	4.67	3.20	4.56	4.17

The survey asks students two follow-up questions on this section. First, “Can you identify courses that were ‘especially useful or meaningful?’ for these skills; and, “Are there any

shortcomings we should address?” On writing skills, we got a few comments; there were no suggestions to address shortcomings:

- Public Policy is the class that helped me develop my writing skills the most. Learning how to write memos is a useful skill that I know I will use in the future.
- Public Policy; Empirical Research Methods

With respect to oral/verbal skills, we received the following comments:

- I greatly developed my oral/verbal skills by being a part of Model UN. I went into that class having very little public speaking experience and left it feeling a lot more confident about my ability to speak in front of an audience and to speak eloquently on the fly.
- Model UN
- I think having more oral presentations could be beneficial.

I.C Learning Goal 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Starting with the indirect Senior Exit Survey data, it appears that the Department is moving students toward proficiency and mastery in writing and oral/verbal skills – at least as far as the students are concerned. However, Maslin’s direct evaluation of the writing and oral/verbal skills of this year’s seniors indicate that 38% of them have only achieved “competency” by the time they graduate. That finding may have been unique to this year’s cohort of graduating students – it should be something we keep an eye on moving forward. As far as the students’ assessment of the Department (Table 3), the numbers from this year (however small the cohort) have not deviated significantly, especially in the writing category, over recent years.

I.C.1 Writing Skills

The development of writing skills is perhaps easier to measure and assess since we all have a variety of writing assignments that we use, from short summary/reflection papers, in-class writing assignments, discussion boards in Teams (Edquist-Whelan uses these as a writing exercise – how to pose clearly-worded questions and discussion items for class) and more formal prompted assignments and longer papers.

We are fairly confident that, by the time our majors leave the College, on the whole their writing skills meet or exceed our department goal (but, see above). What is concerning is how many students at the 200-level (based on our direct evidence) are below that standard (especially the number at the “developing” stage). This might be due to factors outside of our control – poor writing preparation in high school, for example (the evidence of this in our POLI 100 sections is pretty clear). The challenge for us, at this point in time as we are dealing with the aftereffects of learning loss from COVID is to perhaps consider more deliberately what kinds of writing we should be emphasizing in our 200-level courses and most especially for POLI 100, since that course has a common set of learning goals across sections (including for writing). The Department should consider taking an inventory of

what we're doing in our individual sections and share best practices of what strategies and assignment structures are showing real results.

One thing we would appreciate from the Assessment Committee is some comparative data from other departments on their writing-related learning goals, to get a sense of our observations in comparison with others. This might also be useful if the faculty decide (as we believe it should) that it's high time to take a serious look at revising the Collegiate Center's writing program (W1 and W2).

I.C.2 Oral/Verbal Skills

These skills are a bit more difficult to assess in comparison with writing. One question we might raise as a department is whether we should separate writing from oral/verbal skills (as we do in our Senior Exit Survey) as a stand-alone learning goal. Every year we get a few seniors who suggest that we should provide more opportunities for student presentations. We have not recently done an inventory of how we have been doing this in each of our courses, which we should consider.

We will now turn to Learning goal 6.

LG6: [Students] discern areas in which they desire and are prepared to be engaged citizens

II.A Direct Data

II.A.1. Instructors' Evaluation of Student Performance: Course Rubrics

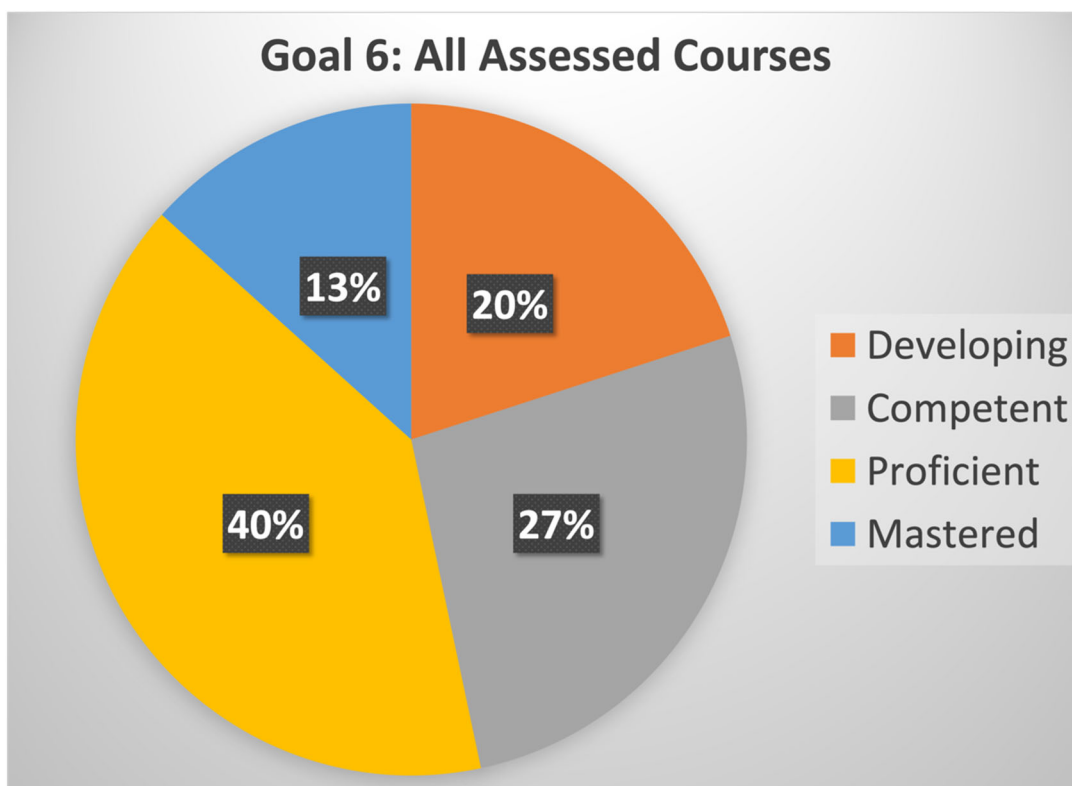
This year we chose to assess two 300-level courses that are germane to this learning goal, using a rubric, the results of which are in Table 4 and Graph 4. The courses are:

- POLI 305 *Arkansas Politics & Practicum* (Gess). The practicum element of the course is a required internship experience, from which we also have direct data in the form of internship supervisor assessments of the students.
- POLI 322 *American Constitutional Law: Individual Rights* (Maslin)

Table 4. Learning Goal 6 Direct Course Assessment

Goal 6: Discern areas in which students desire and are prepared to be engaged citizens							
Course	Evidence Used	I Not Achieved	II Developing	III Competent	IV Proficient	V Mastered	Total
		No or weak attempt to discern areas; no ability to discern.	Only basic or rudimentary attempts to discern areas of desire and preparation.	Demonstrates or articulates some discernment, but not always consistently or to the extent expected.	Meets expectation set by department (achieves goal). Can clearly articulate areas of desire and preparation.	Advanced mastery of writing and oral skills at a level typically reserved for graduate-level students. Exemplary level of understanding and appreciation typically reserved for graduate-level students. Exemplary.	
POLI 305 (Arkansas Politics)	Writing assignments; research project (lit review); in-class engagement	0	1	1	4	1	7
POLI 322 (Constitutional Law)	Writing assignments; research project (lit review); in-class engagement	0	2	3	2	1	8
TOTAL		0	3	4	6	2	15
Percentages		0.0%	20.0%	26.7%	40.0%	13.3%	

Graph 4. Learning Goal 6 – All Courses (N=15)



For these two courses, 53% of students met or exceeded the departmental goal of proficiency, and fewer than half only reached competency or were considered “developing.” While this is encouraging, there is cause for concern that one-fifth of the students are only “developing.” These are 300-level courses that are targeted at Politics majors. On the other hand, the *n* is quite small (15 students in two courses) – in other words, the 20% represents only three students (but an additional four students are merely “competent”).

II.A.2. Feedback from POLI 305 Arkansas Politics & Practicum internship supervisors

This course includes a practicum experience that all seven students taking the course were required to complete, in the form of an internship. Below are the responses we received about the students’ engagement from their site supervisors. The question we posed to them was, “‘Discern areas in which the student desires and is prepared to be an engaged citizen’ is a learning goal of the Hendrix Politics Department. To what extent does your practicum student meet this goal?”

Their response options were the following (and the number of responses)

- Strong evidence of achievement (6)
- Moderate evidence of achievement (1)
- Above-average evidence of achievement (0)

- Low evidence of achievement (0)
- No evidence of achievement (0)
- Cannot judge (0)

We also received the following comments from site supervisors:

- [The student] seems to have learned the importance of citizen engagement, the fundamentals of quality policy development, and the legislative process.
- [The student] seemed to grasp and appreciate the indirect efforts required to support successful advocacy. She worked not only to be engaged in understanding the policy language, but all the associated activities necessary to enable effective involvement.
- She has such an inquisitive mind and was always interested in learning about my work and approached the work with enthusiasm.
- [The student] has run for public office before, and his passion for good government was clear in his work. His diligence and skill surpass many elected officials, and I hope he continues pursuing public service.
- [The student] is very motivated to complete projects and to go above and beyond expectations. She is currently working on our legislative vote guide and wants to see the project through although she graduates soon. She has been eager to learn and always willing to do what is needed on the team.
- After the practicum, [the student] expressed an interest in continuing to stay involved in our organization and to help us bring our work to her hometown of Hot Springs. I have no doubt that she has been activated in her civic participation.

II.B Indirect Data

II.B.1 Student Feedback Surveys: POLI 305 and POLI 322

Professors Gess and Maslin added specific statements about this learning goal to their Student Feedback Surveys for POLI 305 and 322. Students responded to the statement, “This course helped me discern areas in which I desire and am prepared to be an engaged citizen,” using our 5-point Likert Scale, (1=Strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). Results are in Table 5.

Table 5. Student Feedback on “engaged citizenship” in POLI 305 and 322

POLI 305 (N=6)	POLI 322 (N=7)
4.5	4.75

A second question, “How did this course help you discern areas in which you desire and are prepared to be an engaged citizen?” received the following responses, by course.

POLI 305 Arkansas Politics and Practicum (Gess)

- This class really helped me better understand the disposition of the politics in Arkansas which has overall inspired me to stay and hopefully work to better the state.
- My internship experience reinvigorated my desire to work in public policy/policymaking.
- My internship allowed me to explore my future vocation.
- I developed a better understanding of how the educational history of the state of Arkansas overlaps with the current happenings of today's political happenings in the state.
- I had avoided thinking about this for as long as possible but this class definitely provoked those thoughts and I am aware of different career options that I was not before.

POLI 322 American Constitutional Law: Individual Rights (Maslin)

- Keeping track of supreme court cases allows us, as citizens, to keep up with the health and stability of the nation.
- Attention to supreme court cases is important, they change our life as citizens.
- It taught me how to read and understand Supreme Court decisions, which enables me to better understand the recent decisions the court has been making. It also taught me the legal history of many issues I care about, such as abortion, racial justice, and fighting for gun restriction.
- For example the Samia case we had to portray all semester made me more engaged than ever. Because it was a case going on in present times it made me more attentive to before on what is going on within the courts especially at such a macro level. Overall, it made me want to continue keeping up with court cases within the Supreme Court.
- I do not believe that I have become incredibly passionate about any specific issue due to this class, but our discussions on our current Supreme Court Justices and the many legal schools they prescribe themselves to have given me a better understanding of how to approach legal discussions on current or future laws and in turn be able to engage in legal discourse.
- Talking about jury duty, how to read court cases and interpret Court decisions.

II.B.2 Senior Exit Survey

As with Learning Goal 5, we used data from our Senior Exit Survey as an assessment data point. While we do not specifically ask seniors a question about “engaged citizenship,” we do ask them to assess their experiences, separately, in terms of development of leadership abilities and preparation for life after Hendrix. Students give each question a score based on a five-point scale (1 = “almost nothing” to 5 = “immensely”). We then ask follow-up questions about which courses were most useful/meaningful and whether there are

shortcomings the Department should address. Table 6 includes the three prior years' scores with 2022-2023.

Table 6. Learning Goal 6: Senior Exit Survey Responses (5-point scale)

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Leadership	4.5	3.50	4.33	4.17
Life after HDX	4.7	4.10	4.11	4.50

Two follow-up questions asked students to identify courses that were relevant to meeting these goals, and whether there are shortcomings the Department should address. Here are the relevant responses.

Leadership development

- ...nontraditional classes such as Inside/Outside and 497 have helped me grow as a thinker and as a global citizen who has a responsibility to use what I have learned and what I have done to try and make the world a better place.
- In terms of leadership abilities, I found my internship with AJRC to be helpful in allowing me develop leadership skills in order to create the Hendrix Court Watch program. I got to learn directly from the leader of a nonprofit who assisted me every step of the way.
- Model UN mentoring and teaching assistant for POLI 100

Life after Hendrix

- The classes that prepared me the most for life after Hendrix have been civil society, 497, and inside/outside. Civil Society taught me how important each individual is in their community and encouraged me to always be an active members of whatever type of society I'm involved in. Writing my thesis in 497 helped me be able to articulate why having access to representation is so important and inspired me to want to work in legal defense one day. The inside/outside class gave me a fierce determination to always advocate for prisoner rights and further my desire to want to work as a defense attorney.

II.B.3 Model UN Reflection Papers

The Model UN course (283/383) carries Odyssey coding for Special Projects. To receive the credit, students must write a reflection paper. While these are open-ended, we ask students to consider how the Model UN experience shaped discernment of their interests and professional growth and development. Below are a sample of student reflections (there were several more) that seem especially germane for assessing Learning Goal 6. We have highlighted some key passages.

- Although the conference was a simulation and a pretend reenactment, it resembled the present and future. **Maintaining one's values and including individuals in the conversation can be applicable to what we face in society, and the actions done here can foreshadow what we need to improve, and the potential innovative ideas college students have for the years to come.** It was a beautiful experience to interact with those far from us in a city so diverse, an experience that had made me a more meaningful and intentional person.
- Overall, the conference was a really useful way of experiencing what seemed, at first, like such a blurry concept: the UN, how it works and how to act in it. **It helped me grow both academically and personally while also showing me more practically how a hobby could become a potential job field.**
- The Model United Nations mentoring aspect of the course taught me that I would be very fulfilled in the field of growth and development. **Through this course I can see myself pursuing a career as a teacher, a career guidance counselor, a school administrator, corporate trainer, or even social work.**
- **This course has in broad allowed me to view the world and its conflicts in a more international and connected light and has kindled in me in interest to learn about the international system and its complexities so that I may one day truly participate in global reform.**

II.C Learning Goal 6: Discussion and Recommendations

Our major would seem to directly promote this learning goal by its very nature. Students who major in Politics are often likely to pursue directly relevant career paths, such as working for public officials, political parties and campaigns, engaging in advocacy work or public service; and continuing their education in the areas of law, public affairs/public policy, or international studies. The evidence we have reviewed here clearly demonstrates that the Department is meeting this learning goal through a variety of courses and opportunities.

We might expand this learning goal to specifically include leadership development and/or career discernment; or we might want to look at how TEC assesses “engaged citizenship” – is its rubric more “granular” than ours?

III. Overall Conclusions

We have now completed the first round of our original Student Assessment Plan. The Department should review its progress over the past three years and consider whether the learning goals should be tweaked or revised. We should also engage a new course mapping

exercise, since our course offerings and who is teaching what have changed significantly since our last SAP (Jay Barth has left; Pete Gess is now a full-time teacher in the Department, etc.). We would appreciate some guidance from the Assessment Committee as to the standard practice (if there is one) for reviewing departmental learning goals and evidence once all the goals have been assessed during a three-year cycle.