August 11, 2018

Dear Megan and Sasha:

This memo outlines our responses to the Assessment Committee rubric that was provided to us in February 2018. It elaborates on our continuing efforts to further improve some of the strengths and address some of the areas for improvement that this document identified.

Our department is continuing to build on our areas of strength. We use both student development assessments and direct student feedback when designing our curriculum. There are two assessment instruments that we use to measure student development. The first is the pre- and post-test knowledge surveys implemented in POLI 100, which students take within the first three semesters of their college careers. The pre-test assesses their incoming knowledge of the discipline, whereas the post-test assesses the extent to which the course has increased their understanding of the five subfields and has prepared them for further work in the major. We annually code and review the progress made across all course sections and all learning goals. This gives every member of the department a clear sense of how this foundational course went as a whole and what each individual instructor needs to improve on or continue to do well.

The second assessment tool of student development is our POLI 497 senior thesis course. While the learning objective of POLI 100 is to introduce students to the subfields in the discipline, the goal of POLI 497 is to assess the extent to which students can produce original research and apply theoretical, analytical and critical thinking skills that are core objectives of the department. To guide this process, we do an initial assessment of each student's level of preparation by requiring a one-page research design memo to be submitted in the summer prior to POLI 497. This helps us pair students with appropriate thesis supervisors and also informs us about the aspects of the research process that the student cohort might need the most help with while completing the capstone. During the thesis process itself, we continuously monitor and assess student progress, both by breaking up the project into smaller parts and by requiring a full thesis draft two months prior to the due date for the final draft.

In addition to the student development assessments, we use student feedback about how the structure of the major could be changed to better serve our majors. We do that in a less structured way during the formal interviews for distinction that we conduct with our best graduating seniors. We also implement a senior exit survey that is filled out by all of our majors. In 2017/2018, we revised the survey instrument after first putting together a focus group of current students that discussed the old survey with two faculty members.

Our more pressing areas of improvement have to do with tying department goals with student outcomes better, both via regular coursework and the capstone. To that end, during the 2018 departmental retreat, we revisited our learning goals. We determined that only four of the six department goal are actually explicitly listed online – something that we will be addressing in the near future, after discussing whether any changes to language or content is necessary. In addition to formulating the last two goals to be consistent with the already posted ones, we will discuss removing one goal that we were not quite sure was relevant or clear. This will be an ongoing conversation for us during the upcoming semester.

In addition, we developed a rubric that maps our core courses to the learning goals. Each department member was asked to map the extent to which two of his or her courses meets the six department

goals. We made sure that our core major courses, such as POLI 100, POLI 201/202, POLI 303 and POLI 497 are included in this exercise. Our objective is to get an overall sense of the extent to which our curriculum meets the learning goals. Our next step would be to identify the goals that are not sufficiently served by our main courses and have a discussion about the best way to ameliorate any deficiencies in this respect. We also anticipate doing more focused work on tying our senior capstone course to our learning objectives during the Fall Faculty conference.

We appreciate your guidance as we work to improve our assessment processes and welcome any further feedback you might have.

Kiril Kolev
James and Emily Bost Odyssey Associate Professor
Chair, Department of Politics and International Relations