Hendrix College
Department of Politics and International Relations
Senior Seminar (POLI 497) Student Thesis Assessment Rubric

Last Updated: May 5, 2019

Project Component	**Basic**	**Competent**	**Exemplary**
Lit Review	*Section exists w/ title *Limited use of scholarly literature; not comprehensive; limited sources	*Lists relevant literature and summary of its contribution; no thread connecting logic of existing research	*Synthesize *Hear student's own voice guiding literature *Recognizes different theoretical traditions/approaches
Research Question	*Can be answered, has question mark *Better understood as topic	*Linked to literature *Descriptive rather than analytical *Maybe not interesting	*Narrow that emerged from and in response to literature/research *Salient
Theory Development	*Not present *Expresses opinion without underlying logic or data *Some ability to express theory verbally	*Difficulty clarifying own argument or explanation *Clear hypothesis with direction of relationship *Why is this happening / Has it occurred?	*Discussion of logic underlying the chain between causes and outcomes
Analytical Framework	*Identifies steps *Difficulty explaining why approach is appropriate	*Methods are appropriate to answer question	*Clear link between question asked and methods used *Grapples with methodological approach/tradeoffs *Consideration of alternatives
Evidence	*Evidence found or collected *Innappropriate/ misrepresentation of citations-as-evidence	*Evidence is appropriate to answering question	*Identifies weaknesses or limits of data *Evidence that helps adjudicate between alternative explanations
Analysis & Results	*Some attempt at analysis	*Presents	*High quality analysis *Considers alternatives *Evidence interpreted not just presented
Implications	*Little or no attention *Not even relevant	*Difficulty discussing specific implications; may be evident but not explicit	*Explicit discussion of real world and/or future research and/or career
Give feedback	*Participates minimally	*Comes prepared with	*Asks pertinent or high-

	*Attends regularly	feedback *Asks questions and offer constructive advice	impact questions and identifies key areas for improvement *Able to prioritize feedback *Engages with peers at high level (not just professor)
Receive feedback	*Listens *May respond	*Listens and able to respond to feedback substantively and directly *Incorporates to instructor feedback	*Makes revisions that make sense based on feedback received
Writing	*Citations present *Many copyediting errors *Should have used the writing center	*Citations correct *Grammatically correct *Well structured; logical *Discipline appropriate	*Compelling *Presents compelling case for relevance and importance *Transitions smoothly from sections; paper is whole rather than series of sections

Department of Politics and International Relations

Student Assessment Plan

Departmental Learning Goals

The Department of Politics and International Relations has the following learning goals:
- Learning Goal 1: Development of critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills with primary reference to political science and the social sciences more generally.
- Learning Goal 2: Familiarity with the major concepts and theoretical traditions in political science.
- Learning Goal 3: Exposure to and familiarity with the content of the five subfields in political science: methodology, American politics, political theory/philosophy, international relations/global politics, and comparative politics.
- Learning Goal 4: Exposure to the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the study of political, economic, and social phenomena.
- Learning Goal 5: Enhancement of oral and written communication skills.
- Learning Goal 6: Preparation for engaged citizenship.

Evidence Used in Assessment

There are four primary tools of assessment that The Politics and International Relations department uses every year with respect to our departmental learning goals.

POLI 100, our gateway course, features an initial assessment of student knowledge of the discipline on the first day of class. This same instrument is used at the end of the class to assess the extent to which student knowledge has increased after taking the course. During our departmental summer retreats, we compile and evaluate the results and discuss strategies for improvement. This instrument asks students to:
- Elaborate on how the topic of their particular section of POLI 100 (which varies across instructors[1]) can be approached by the five subfields of political science. This task directly relates to Learning Goal 3.
- Identify how normative and empirical approaches to the discipline enable us to understand the topic of the course differently. This task relates to Learning Goal 2.
- Entertain the steps that need to be taken to test a hypothesis using the social scientific method. This task aims at addressing Learning Goal 1.
- Discuss how disciplines outside of political science can supplement our understanding of the topic of the course. This is consistent with Learning Goal 4.

POLI 100 also features several writing assignments that culminate in an initial research paper, which is assessed with respect to writing skills (Learning Goal 5).

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[1] For example, in 2018-2019, there were four sections of POLI 100 that focused on climate change, democracy, criminal justice, and gender.

POLI 497, our capstone course, requires students to produce original research that consists of posing a research question, surveying existing literature, developing a theoretical argument, testing the argument using evidence, and reflecting on the implications of the findings. In many ways, this course concludes student development that started in POLI 100 and has unfolded as students have gone through the curriculum. The research paper itself directly relates to <u>Learning Goals 1, 2, and 3</u>. During course meetings, students are expected to provide review to the projects of their peers as they themselves develop their projects. This discussion-based environment relates to <u>Learning Goal 5</u> too. This objective is further bolstered by the "UR" module and "W2" coding for the course. Students who choose to gain "UR" credit for their capstone are required to deliver a formal presentation at a conference. On the other hand, the heavy writing and constant revision of work relates well to the writing development objective that we have as a department.

The assessment of how students perform in the senior capstone course goes beyond the traditional instructor evaluation. In fact, course instructors meet throughout the semester to calibrate their expectations and share the results they are getting. We gather once more as a department before final grades are assigned to get a sense of how the class went and assess the most exceptional and least satisfactory projects.

POLI 100 and POLI 497 serve as bookends to our student development and have therefore featured considerable assessment that directly relates to our learning goals. They have also been a constant feature of our curriculum for at least a decade now. At the same time, we have continuously assessed how we guide students between the POLI 100 and POLI 497 courses. To accomplish this, we have relied heavily on our senior exit survey, as well as our distinction interviews.

The exit survey instrument directly asks students to provide feedback on questions that relate to our departmental learning goals. Respondents are asked to evaluate the extent to which the department prepared them with respect to their analytical, critical thinking, writing and oral skills; their knowledge of the discipline; the development of cross-cultural appreciation and ethical values; their understanding of political science subfields; and their ability to get involved in engaged learning opportunities.

The distinction interviews are another assessment tool that has proven to be rather helpful. Every April, pairs of faculty members spend about an hour with each graduating senior that has earned an overall GPA of 3.4, a major GPA of 3.6 and at least a B+ on the senior thesis. While a bit more open-ended, these conversations always seek to understand the extent to which some of our best students think we have accomplished our departmental goals. We have received a lot of valuable feedback that has been used to guide new course development and curriculum changes in the last five years.