Hendrix College Politics Department
Annual Assessment Report, 2021-22

The Politics Student Assessment Plan, Annual Assessment Cycle, calls for Departmental Learning Goals 1 and 4 to be assessed during the 2021-22 academic year. These goals, and the corresponding evidence used for assessing them:

1. Demonstrate critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills with primary reference to political science and the social sciences more generally (POLI 202 *Empirical Research Methods*, POLI 303 *Analyzing Politics*, POLI 497 *Senior Thesis*, and Senior Exit Survey).

4. Understand and appreciate the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the study of political, economic, and social phenomena (POLI 100 *Issues in Politics*, POLI 210 *American Political Institutions*, POLI 310 *American Presidency*, POLI 305 *Arkansas Politics and Government Seminar*, and Senior Exit Survey).

Additionally, departmental members Gess, Kolev, Maslin, and Whelan met to discuss the 2021-22 assessment on May 6, 12:00-1:30 p.m. Dr. Shanks was unavailable but sent in her feedback ahead of the meeting.

The Evidence

POLI 100 Issues in Politics

POLI 100 is a fresher-level course designed to introduce students to the study of politics. The course is taught by everyone in the Department, each one of whom chooses their own theme or topic around which the course is structured. Recent topics have included Liberalism, Pandemics, Civil Society, New Authoritarianism, Inequality, Gender, Democracy, and Climate Change.

The department utilizes two instruments—one direct and one indirect—to assess student learning in POLI 100 and achievement of departmental learning goals. The direct assessment consists of a pretest (administered on the first day of class) and a post-test (administered on or near the last day of class). The brief instrument asks students several open-ended questions to determine the extent to which the course's learning goals (which hew closely to the Department's overall goals) are being met. The responses are anonymous. The qualitative data are reviewed, and each response is given a score:

- 0 = no answer or completely wrong
- 1 = basic understanding
- 2 = advanced understanding
- 3 = capstone understanding (deep, rich, nuanced)

We then compare the scores, in aggregate, between the pretest and post-test to determine the extent to which there has been upward movement.

The indirect assessment consists of five additional standard student feedback form questions which all instructors add to the standard ten questions. Not all departmental learning goals are covered by these five questions.

Other Courses
POLI 202, POLI 210, POLI 303, POLI 305, POLI 310, POLI 497

The Politics Department curriculum mapping process indicates these courses map favorably ("fundamental to the course") on Goals 1 and 4. For each of these courses, the instructor applied a rubric (see Appendix A) to all students to determine how many scored on each of five levels of goal achievement: Not Achieved, Developing, Competent, Proficient, and Mastered.

Senior Exit Survey

The department administers a survey to graduating seniors every April. The survey is anonymous and is intended to capture a wide variety of data with respect to the major as a whole and students' experiences in the department during their time at Hendrix. Many of the questions are a self-assessment on the learning goals.

In spring 2022, ten of thirteen graduating Politics seniors completed the survey, for a response rate of 77%

Analysis: Goal 1

"Demonstrate critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills with primary reference to political science and the social sciences more generally."

POLI 202 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric

POLI 202 *Empirical Research Methods* is required by the major. Students typically take the course during their sophomore year. As the foundation of the Departmental research sequence, it emphasizes critical thinking and analytical reasoning. In Spring 2022, sixteen students took the course. Dr. Shanks assessed the students using the Goal 1 rubric:

Goal 1 Achievement: POLI 202
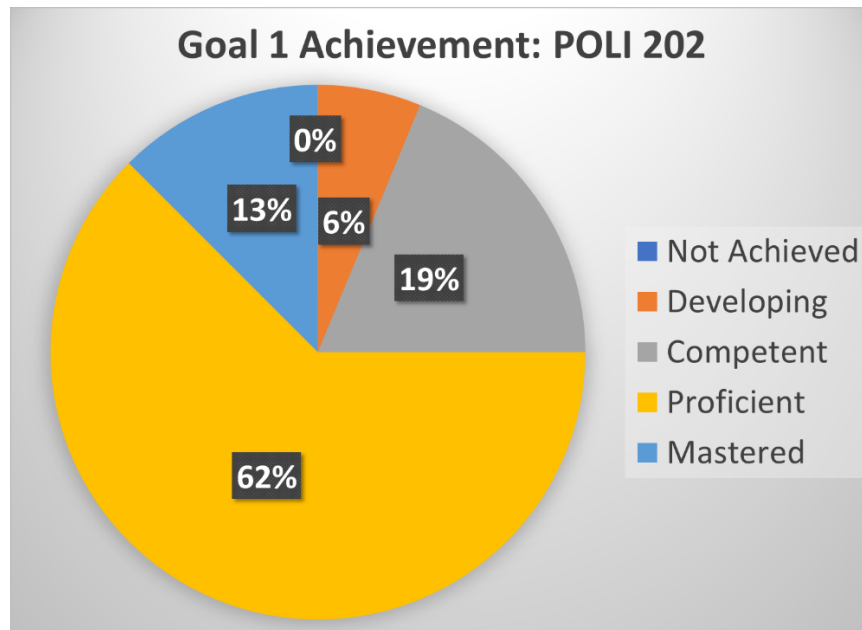
Three-fourths of the students, or twelve of the sixteen students, achieved proficiency or mastery on this goal. Only 6%, or one student, are at the lowest two levels, not achieved and developing.

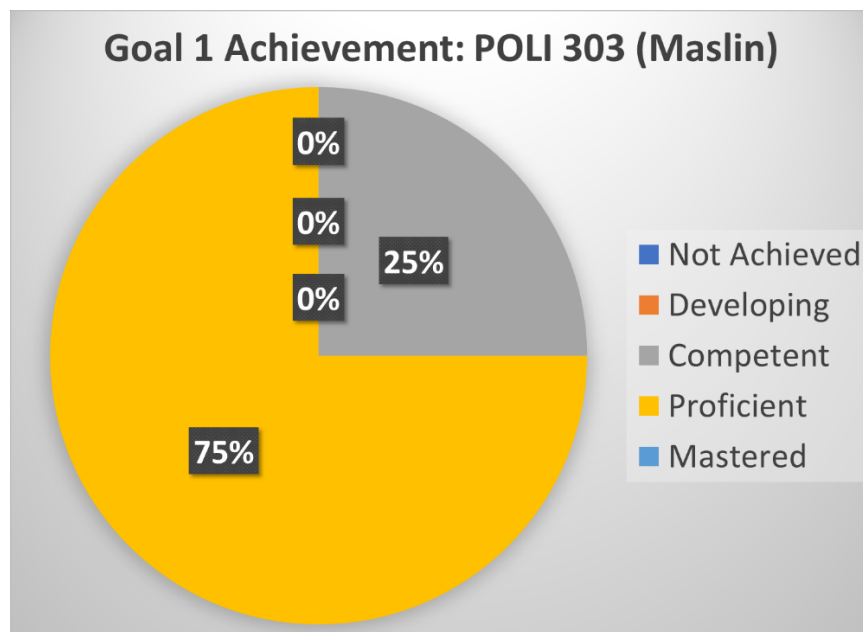*POLI 303 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric*

POLI 303 *Analyzing Politics* is also a required course and part of the research methods sequence in the Department. Typically, juniors take this course. In 2021-22, two sections were offered, both in the fall semester.

Dr. Kolev's direct assessment according to the rubric:
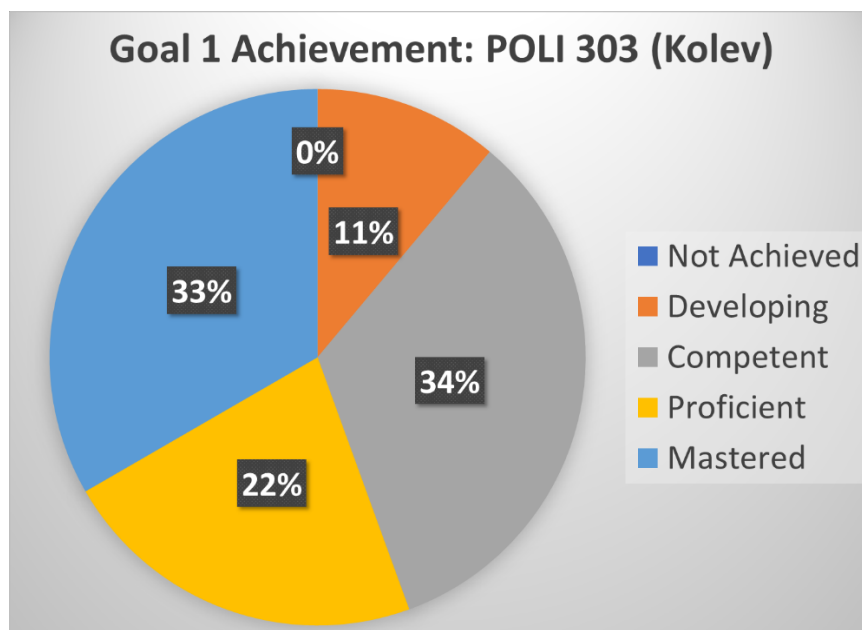
Fifty-five percent, or five of the nine students, achieved proficiency or mastery. Only 11%, or one of the nine students, only reached the lowest two levels, not achieved and developing.

Dr. Maslin's direct assessment according to the rubric:

Goal 1 Achievement: POLI 303 (Maslin)

0%

0%

25%

0%

75%

- Not Achieved
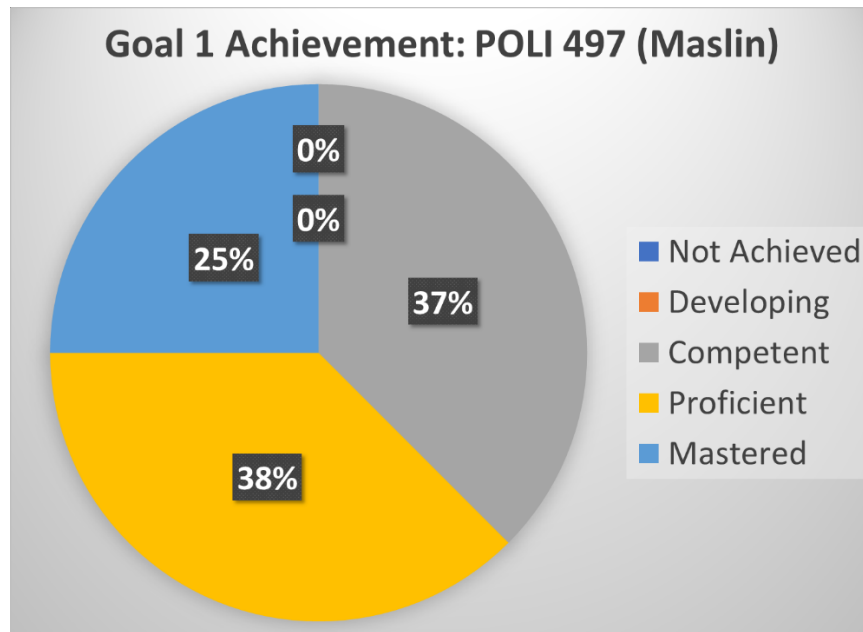- Developing
- Competent
- Proficient
- Mastered

This course had only four students. Three of them, or 75%, demonstrated proficiency on Goal 1. One student achieved the competent level.

POLI 497 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric

POLI 497 *Senior Thesis* serves as the capstone course for both the research sequence and the major. Students take the course as seniors, in the fall semester. This past fall there were two sections.

Dr. Maslin's assessment of her students:

Goal 1 Achievement: POLI 497 (Maslin)

Of the eight students in this section, five students, or 63% achieved proficiency or mastery. No students scored at the two lowest levels, not achieved or developing.

And Dr. Shanks assessment according to the rubric:

Goal 1 Achievement: POLI 497 (Shanks)
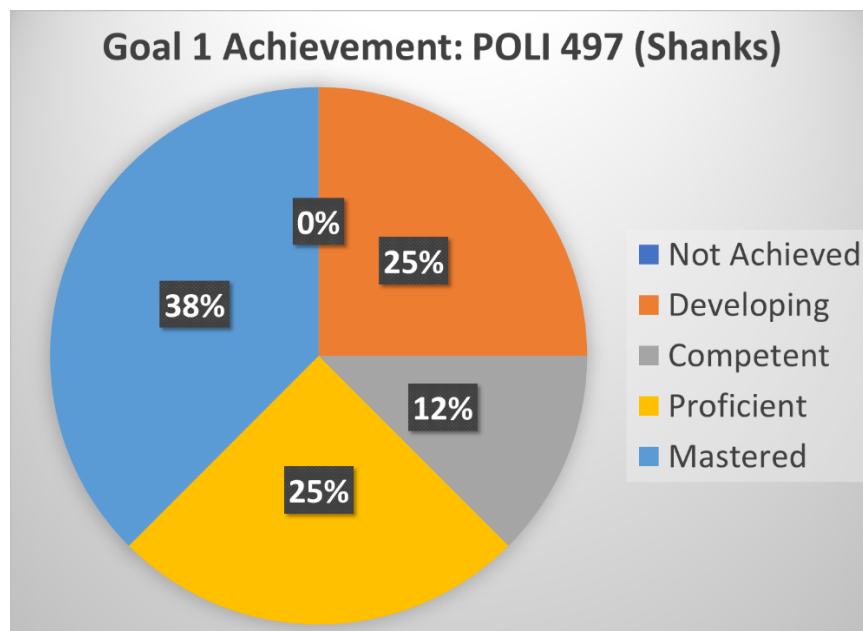
This section also had eight students. And like the other section of POLI 497, five students achieved proficiency or mastery. However, two students, or 25%, only achieved the developing stage of goal attainment.

Summary of Goal 1 Direct Assessment of Courses: Instructor-Rubric

A total of forty-five students enrolled in the five sections detailed above:
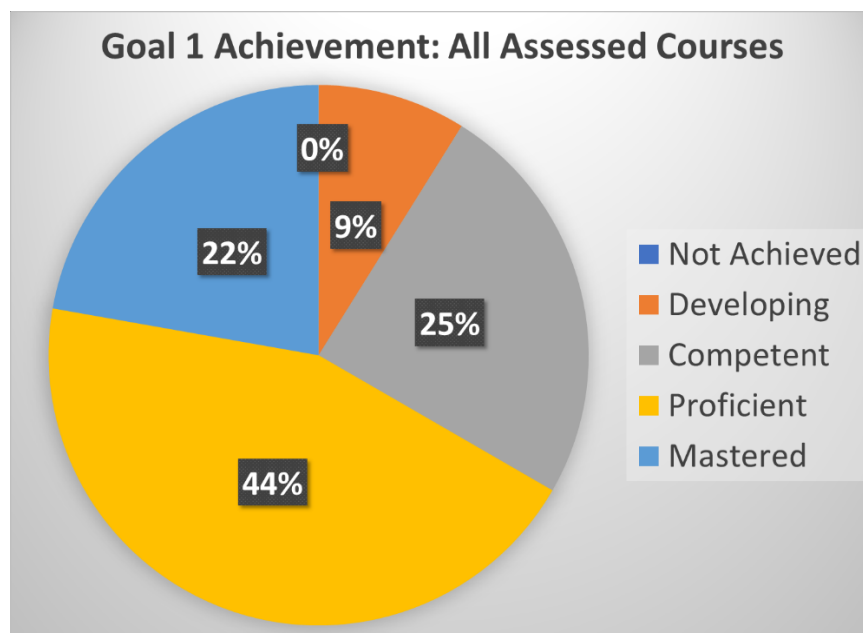
Across sections, 67% or thirty students achieved proficiency or mastery on Goal 1. Impressively, ten students, or nearly one-quarter, achieved mastery, which meets "the level typically reserved for graduate-level students." Also importantly, no students were assessed at the not achieved level, and only four students we placed at the developing stage, "only basic or rudimentary demonstration" of the skills associated with Goal 1. Unfortunately, two of these students demonstrated the developing level in POLI 497, near the completion of their careers at Hendrix. The Department will continue to work to have more students finish coursework and time at Hendrix at the proficient or mastered level.

Senior Exit Survey Indirect Analysis

Question 4 on the senior survey consists of a Likert scale and two subparts address our first learning goal. Additionally, Question 5 provides the opportunity for students to provide open-ended, qualitative feedback. Finally, Question 12 provides the opportunity for students to provide qualitative feedback on the Politics research sequence of courses.

Q2: Assess on a scale of 1-5 (1 = almost nothing; 5 = immensely) the degree to which Politics/IR courses have contributed to your development in analytical skills:

2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
4.67	4.40	4.67

After a bit of a drop off last year, student self-assessment on this question rebounded this year. In fact, seven of the ten students responded with a "5" (the other three with a "4").

Q2: Assess on a scale of 1-5 (1 = almost nothing; 5 = immensely) the degree to which Politics/IR courses have contributed to your development in critical thinking skills:

2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
4.67	4.30	4.78

Responses here also rebounded, to an even higher degree. Eight of the ten respondents answered with a "5," and only two with a "4."

Clearly, students believe they have done well on Goal 1, both with critical thinking and analytical skills.

Question 5 simply allows students to elaborate on their Likert responses to Question 4. Open-ended responses relevant to Goal 1:

> These were the biggest areas of growth for me and the classes that we were required to take had a large hand in my development.

> Most of the shortcomings I felt I experienced in these facets was more a result of covid than the department. Having two years of laid back courses that were trying to balance remote with the emotional burden of the pandemic alongside tech issues and so on resulted in me finding myself really lacking in many standard research skills that I would have otherwise obtained earlier on in my academic journey

> This may be a result of the virtual/hybrid semesters, but I feel like I was not prepared in my research skills by the time I got to poli 497. As well, the structure of 497 is really hard and fast paced and it feels like you are always behind.

> I think some research skills didn't feel developed enough before the thesis, but I know that 202 is adding a lab and think that changes like that could help with that.

> The department is really good about making sure that students grow academically during their time at Hendrix. I would say that research and methodological skills are very hard for students to grasp and spending time getting to feel confident about qualitative and quantitative research methods should be a priority. This is especially true when thinking about R and statistics.

Most of these responses are positive. However, some students indicate they are not well prepared for the research endeavor in POLI 497 *Senior Thesis*. This feedback seems amplified by the pandemic and teaching adjustments made for especially this senior class. Still, this feedback in consistent with past data; one new data-driven decision is to add the laboratory component to POLI 202 *Empirical Research Methods.* The Department is also working to reestablish the expected academic culture within POLI courses. For example, the entire Department is reading *Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do About it*, by James M. Lang, this summer. While Lang finished the book just before the pandemic broke, we expect its suggestions and strategies will help pedagogically.

Q12: How well did the sequence of courses (202/203 and 303) leading up to POLI 497 (Senior Seminar) cultivate the skills necessary to successfully write your senior thesis?

This is an open-ended, quantitative question:

> These courses help us grasp R studio and be prepared to create a research topic that could be very well tested and explained through the skills we learned in this class. These classes are probably the 2 most important required courses.

As mentioned, Covid really threw a wrench in this and I felt I struggled on my thesis more than I should have as the analytical side I had quite literally no experience with until it was time to do it for my thesis.

Those classes prepared me well for the thesis. They got me used to selecting research topics as well as giving me practice in research and long form writing.

As I mentioned above, I think my answer to this question is partially skewed by covid as my 202 and 303 classes were taken during the semester when we were all first originally sent home for covid and my 203 class was taken remotely. However, I do think that it is a very logical and useful sequence. I think that many students would benefit from taking 203 (political inquiry) either concurrently with 303 and/or prior to 497 because this was the class that really taught me about different modes of inquiry and what is gained/lost from using different forms of analysis. Having had this class prior to my senior thesis, I felt that I was much better prepared to determine what kind of approach I wanted to utilize and why when researching my senior thesis topic. I also thing that a greater emphasis on actually conducting different types of statistical analyses would greatly improve students' preparation for 497, just because I felt so lost trying to figure out for the first time how I can actually use the data to answer my question before I am asked to do it in my senior thesis.

This graduation class had to deal with COVID, so that certainly hindered the usual path through these courses. That being said, I think 303 especially could benefit from being much more closely tied to Senior Sem. It would probably be better for everyone if by the end of 303, students had chosen their thesis subject.

I wish there were more topics for 303 topics. I know many people who had to take a 303 in a topic that did not interest them, and then when it came time for thesis had to scramble to find a topic that interested them. To me, it seems like you are almost expected to do your thesis on the same topic that your 303 was on (or at least it is a lot easier when you do). When there is not a lot of variety of 303 topics I think this can leave students feeling like they are behind before 497 has even started.

I felt like 202 and 303 did not fully prepare me for POLI 497, particularly with the statistical aspects. I feel as if I did not have a very solid grasp on RStudio from those classes, but I also am unsure why we spent so much time on R when so many people did not use it for their thesis at all. I also think that the structure and pacing of the 497 process was not realistic or productive, the deadlines were difficult to manage and did not accurately reflect how much time each step of the process took. While I am glad that I was done by the spring, it felt very cramped in one semester and we had to hit the ground running in a way that does not seem true for other capstones. Overall, I am glad I had the experience of the thesis and the professors were all very supportive during the process, but I think some structural changes could make it much less stressful.

They were logical and definitely aided in 497. I wish more discussions over topics were given, and I think students that took 303 as IR majors suffered from having non-IR professors. that hindered me a lot in 497 with specifically choosing a topic and feeling confident in my choice

I had Dr. XXX for 202 and 303 and they were also during consecutive semesters, so I felt very prepared. However, there was over a full year gap between when I took 303 and 497, so my knowledge of R was not as good as it could have been.

POLI201/202 were useful in cultivating research skills and abilities to do normative analysis, but like I mentioned earlier, my 303 was dissimilar to other 303s, and I did not find it very helpful in writing my senior thesis. We didn't do much research besides our final research project, which felt more like a research paper that I could've written for other classes, rather than preparation for a paper as rigorous as the senior thesis.

Again, this feedback is mostly positive, although tempered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to online learning (this senior class was especially affected). However, there are certainly criticisms here which should be addressed by the department going forward.

Discussion and Recommendations

While the evidence for Goal 1 attainment is overwhelmingly positive, there exists room for improvement. It is easy to point to pandemic as culprit, given that the Class of 2022 was greatly affected during two important years (typically when POLI 202/203 and POLI 303 occur). The Department will continue to strive for students to maximize development of critical thinking and analytical reason skills.

Specific Recommendations:

- POLI 202: This will be the first year the laboratory will be part of POLI 202. It will be important for the Department as a whole to identify specific outcomes for the lab, and then assess them. We should not wait until Goal 1 is next specifically evaluated to measure the impact of the lab component.

- POLI 303: This course continues to be a source of frustration for some students. The Department will continue conversations about how to better make this course live up to its potential. This should include a "backward mapping" exercise to ensure we have common expectations on what students need to succeed in POLI 497, and "complete the bridge" with POLI 202/203. All POLI 303s should be consistent; perhaps the Department can find a way to offer additional topics within each section since we will not be able to offer more sections.

- Discuss ways students can "practice" analytical research throughout the Politics curriculum. This may include exposing students to more empirical, published research as well as incorporating various research activities in all courses.

- Explore ways to encourage more students to undertake rigorous, Odyssey UR projects complete with final publications or presentations at professional conferences. Discover ways to efficiently mentor students in these endeavors.

Analysis: Goal 4

"Understand and appreciate the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the study of political, economic, and social phenomena."

POLI 100 Direct Assessment: Pre- and Post-Test

POLI 100 *Issues in Politics* is also required of all majors. Students typically take the course during their first or second year. A specific goal of the course is to introduce students to the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the field of politics.

For each section of POLI 100, the instructors administer a pre-test at the beginning of the semester, and a post-test at completion. The qualitative data from these tests are evaluated according to the process outlined in the first section of this document.
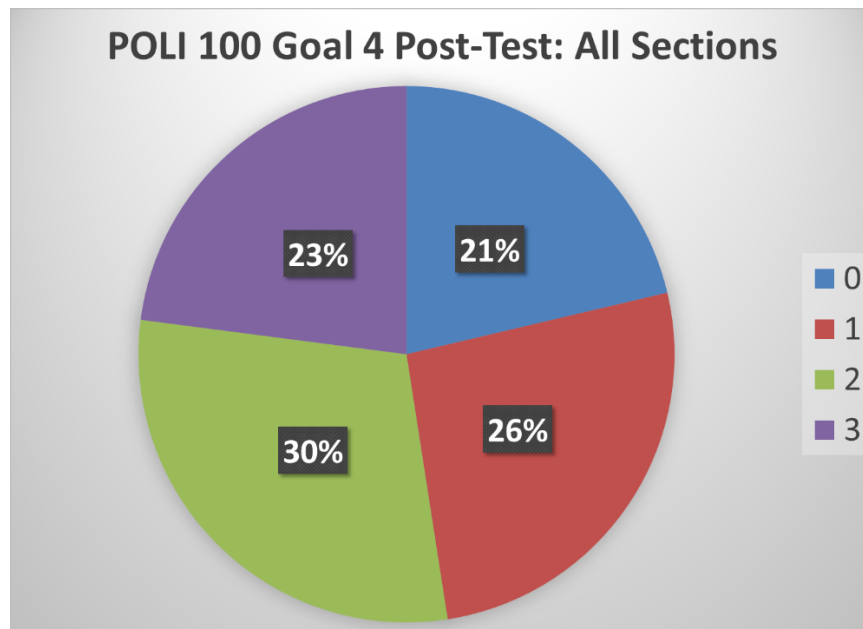
First, the results from the pre-test:

POLI 100 Goal 4 Pre-Test: All Sections

- 17%
- 20%
- 25%
- 38%

Legend: 0, 1, 2, 3
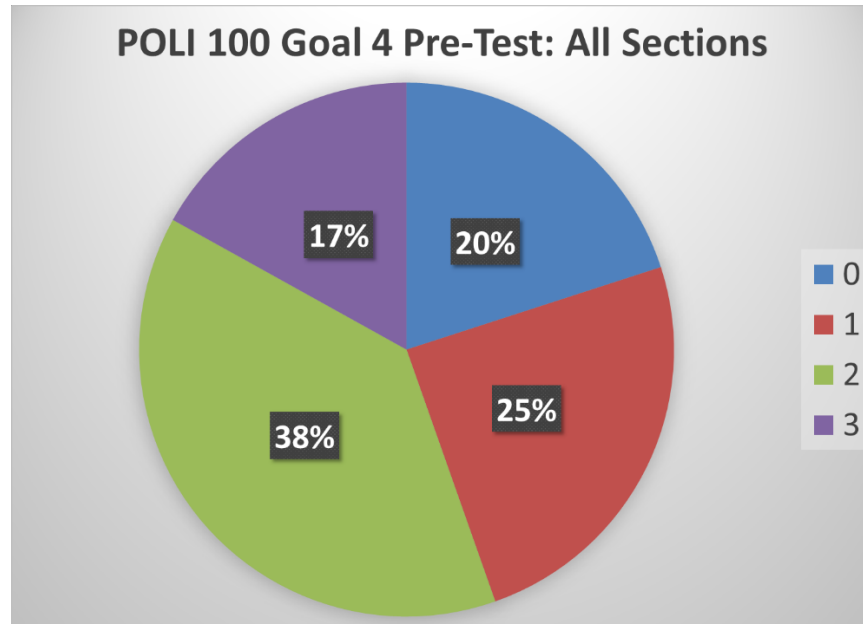
The results are mostly balanced:
- no answer/wrong: 13 students (20%)
- basic understanding: 16 students (25%)
- advanced understanding: 25 students (38%)
- capstone understanding: 11 students (17%)

And the post-test results:

POLI 100 Goal 4 Post-Test: All Sections

- 23%
- 21%
- 26%
- 30%

Legend: 0, 1, 2, 3

The results are perhaps even more balanced, and very similar to the pre-test:

- no answer/wrong: 13 students (21%)
- basic understanding: 16 students (26%)
- advanced understanding: 18 students (30%)
- capstone understanding: 14 students (23%)

Unfortunately, there was little movement on the lower end, the no answer or basic understanding. Only a few students improved to capstone understanding. One possible explanation is the pandemic-effect on our first-year students. Those that taught POLI 100 this year have remarked that students are not well prepared and had trouble engaging. Still, there is work to be done to help students better understand the multi- and interdisciplinary nature of political and social sciences.

*POLI 100 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric*

A rubric like that employed to assess Goal 1 attainment was used to assess Goal 4 attainment (see Appendix A). In the 2021-22 academic year, four sections of POLI 100 were offered.

Dr. Shanks (fall semester) assessment of Goal 4 achievement according to the rubric:
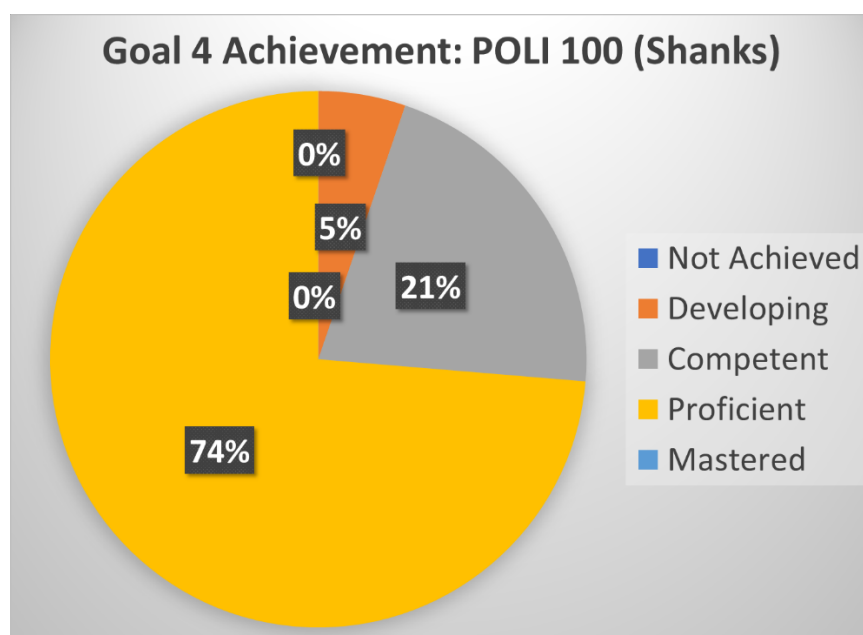

In this "Civil Society" section of POLI 100, fourteen students (74%) achieved proficiency on Goal 4. No students mastered the goal, but none were marked as "not achieved" either. Five students are either developing or competent on this goal.

Dr. Whelan also applied the Goal 4 rubric to his section of POLI 100 (fall):

Goal 4 Achievement: POLI 100 (Whelan)
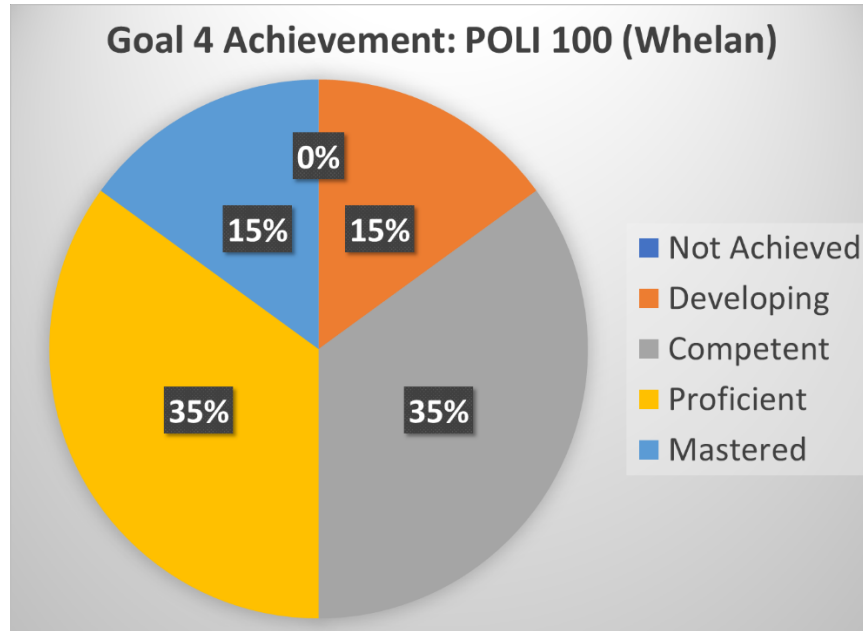
Results for Dr. Whelan's "Liberalism" are balanced, with half the class (ten students) achieving proficiency or mastery, and the other half achieving developing or competency. No students were marked as "not achieved."

In the spring semester, Dr. Maslin taught two sections of "Pandemics." The results for the two sections are combined here:


Goal 4 Achievement: POLI 100 (Maslin)
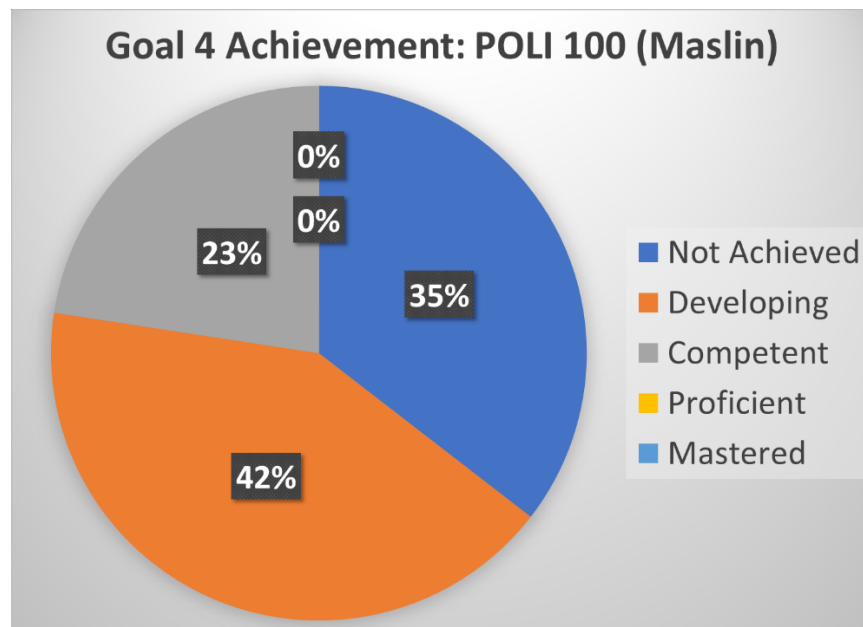
These results are very different, with no students achieving mastery or proficiency. Seven students, or 23% achieved competency on Goal 4. However, eleven students, or 35%, did not achieve this goal at all.

A resulting question: was Goal 4 student achievement in Pandemics this significantly different than in Liberalism and Civil Society? Or are the instructors utilizing different criteria for assessing students? The Departmental members need to discuss further to be sure we are being consistent.

POLI 210 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric

POLI 210 *American Political Institutions* was not offered during the 2021-22 academic year. However, because the course maps significantly onto Goal 4, we include data from spring semester 2021:
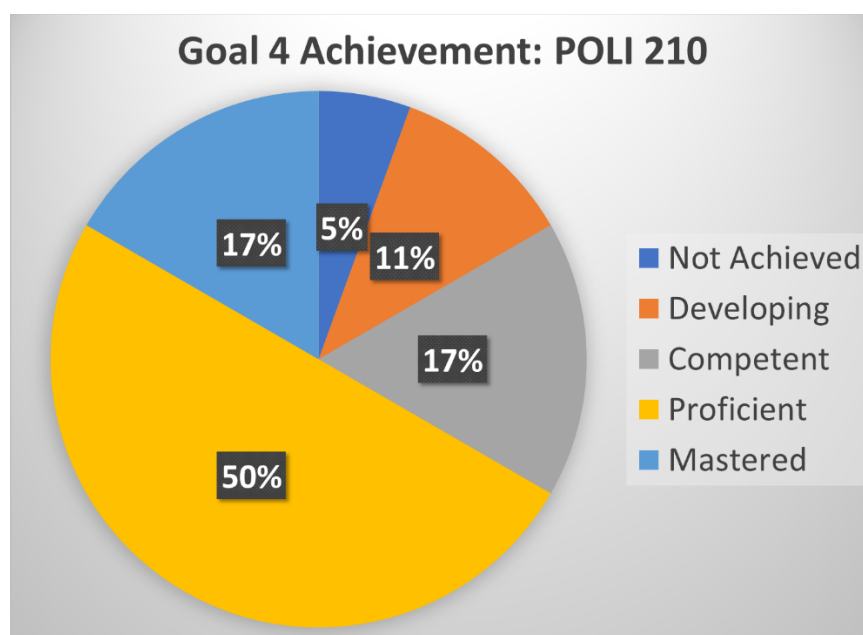

Half of the class, or nine students, achieved proficiency on Goal 4. An additional 3 students mastered Goal 4 through the course. One student did not achieve this goal.

POLI 310 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric

POLI 310 *American Presidency* was not offered during the 2021-22 academic year. In fact, it has been several years since it has been taught. And since it was usually taught by retired Dr. Barth, it will no longer appear in our assessment plan.

*POLI 305 Direct Assessment: Instructor-Rubric*

POLI 305 *Arkansas Politics and Government Seminar* was also not offered during the 2021-22 academic year. However, since it maps highly on Goal 4, we include data from spring 2021:

Goal 4 Achievement: POLI 305
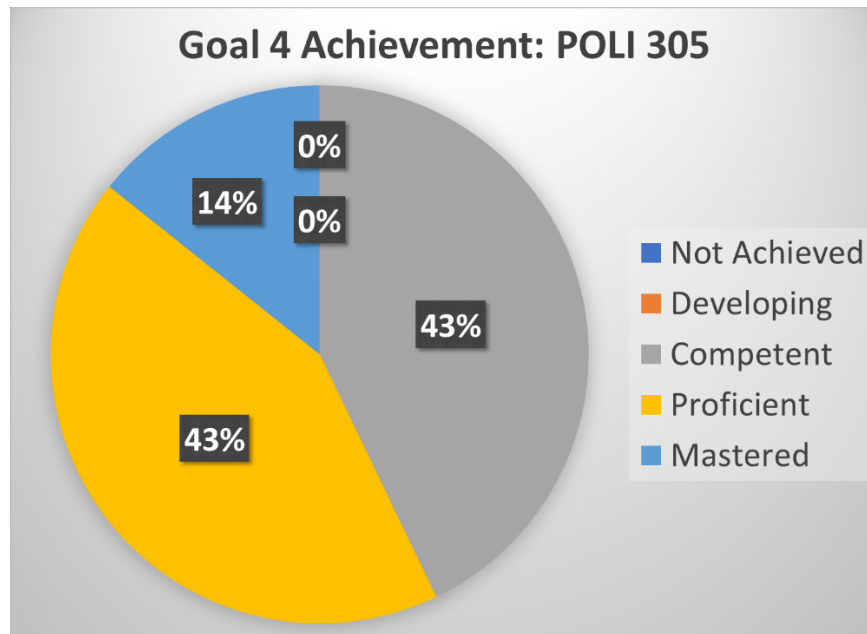
In POLI 305, all students achieved at least competency on Goal 4. Four of the seven students achieved proficiency or mastery.

Summary of Goal 4 Direct Assessment of Courses: Instructor-Rubric

A total of ninety-five students enrolled in the six sections detailed above. The summary pie chart:

Goal 4 Achievement: All Assessed Courses
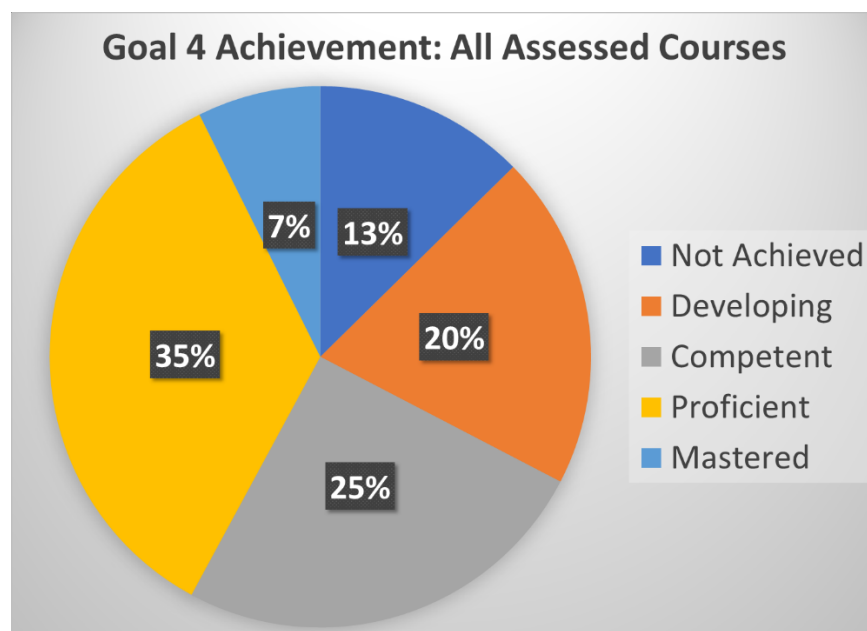
Two-thirds of the students achieved competency, proficiency, or mastery on Goal 4. Only one-third are listed as "not achieved" or developing. This outcome is lower than demonstrated through the application of the rubric to Goal 1, indicating the Department has more work to do here.

Senior Exit Survey Indirect Analysis

One question on the senior survey addresses Learning Goal 4:

Q14: How well does the department (through coursework and other experiences) expose you to the interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary nature of understanding political, economic, and social phenomena?

And the open-ended, qualitative responses:

All of the classes I have been in take material that was written many years ago and try to work it into modern times which is a really fun and sometimes challenging exercise. Dr. XXX does a really good job at this and helps us understand these topics as they relate to other parts of society.
Very well. I never thought that there was one definitive method for thinking about an issue.
I think that the department works incredibly hard to expose us to understanding all of these phenomena. I do think that I have a much better grasp of political and social phenomena rather than the economic nature of politics. While I clearly understand that these two fields are innately interconnected, I do think that I was able to take classes that did not focus on the economic aspect of politics very thoroughly.
More econ maybe, but otherwise excellent. The reason i became an IR major was the exposure to other disciplines due to their relevance with Politics.
I think the classes that I took that did this the best were politics of punishment and normative political economy.
I think that the department does this well, but I think cultural awareness could be more incorporated into our understanding of political/economic/social phenomena. I feel like the perspectives provided by the department are intelligent and empirically based, but in my view there was a lack of communication about the way that the non-western world approaches different ways of political thought.

These responses are mostly positive. It is important to understand that most of the direct assessment data come from POLI 100, typically taken by first-year students. The indirect assessment data come from graduating seniors. In this case, students after four years believe the Department is achieving this goal.

The interests in more economic and non-Western approaches to studying political phenomena are noted.

Discussion and Recommendations

The pre- and post-tests for POLI 100 do not demonstrate significant growth in the understanding of the multi- and interdisciplinary nature of the study of political and social phenomena. The pandemic does have an effect here; students who took POLI 100 this year demonstrate the least growth on Goal 4 across the history of the course. It will be important to keep an eye on this goal next year, even though it is not again on the assessment cycle until 2024-25.

The instructor-rubric method of direct assessment is more reassuring. Across all assessed courses, 7% of students achieve mastery of Goal 4, which is typically expected of graduate students. Another 60% achieved proficiency or competency. One-third remain at no achievement or developing, indicating

there is still work to be done. However, when POLI 100 is removed from the analysis—as it is a first-year course—only three of twenty-five students (12%) are assessed at these two lower levels.

Finally, the qualitative data from the senior survey is positive. Students are complementary while offering constructive ideas for thinking more broadly about multi- and interdisciplinarity.

Specific recommendations:

- As a result of this assessment work over the past two years, the Department recommended pursuing a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence to diversify our curriculum and course offerings. We are pleased to report that Dr. Ghaïda Ghediri, from Tunisia, will join us for the 2022-23 academic year. Importantly, Ghaïda is very interested in interdisciplinary work, and her non-Western approaches respond well to some of the student comments above. The Departmental members should learn from Ghaïda so that her important input is sustainable beyond the year she is with us.

- Explore offering more political-economy courses. Incorporate additional economic approaches in courses (e.g., *Public Policy*).

- POLI 100: Continue to be explicit about the multi- and interdisciplinary nature of the field. Incorporate readings which demonstrate this and create at least one assignment to reinforce this nature of politics.

- Continue to emphasize multi- and interdisciplinarity throughout the Politics curriculum. Encourage students to undertake Odyssey SP projects that explore political phenomena through interdisciplinary approaches. Mentor students in these projects.

Goal 1: Demonstrate critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills with primary reference to political science and the social sciences more generally

I Not Achieved	II Developing	III Competent	IV Proficient	V Mastered
No demonstration of these skills, or no understanding of how these skills are important to political and social sciences.	Only basic or rudimentary demonstration of these skills.	Applies these skills in some political and social science contexts, but not always completely or consistently.	Meets expectation set by department (achieves goal). Applies these skills regularly to the subject matter.	These skills meet the level typically reserved for graduate-level students. Exemplary.

Goal 4: Understand and appreciate the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the study of political, economic, and social phenomena

I Not Achieved	II Developing	III Competent	IV Proficient	V Mastered
No understanding or appreciation of the inter- and multi-disciplinarity of the study of political and social sciences.	Only basic or rudimentary understanding; may articulate examples, but not appreciate why they are important.	Demonstrates some understanding and appreciation, but not always consistently or to the extent expected.	Meets expectation set by department (achieves goal). Understanding and appreciation are readily present in oral and written arguments.	A level of understanding and appreciation typically reserved for graduate-level students. Exemplary.