

Departmental Assessment Meeting: Report

Please fill out this report based on your department's conversation and return via e-mail to Megan Leonard or Sasha Pfau by March 31, 2017.

Summary of past decisions

Please summarize up to three departmental changes made since the last HLC visit (08-09) the impetus for those changes and any changes to information gathering about student development.

1. Addition of POLI 201 (normative research methods) as an alternative track in the methods sequence.
2. Addition of POLI 303 (analyzing politics) as the locus of the research designs for the capstone experience.
3. Addition of 3 professional development modules in POLI 497 (senior seminar).

The impetus for #1-#2 is that POLI 400 (empirical research methods) was bearing too much of the burden of preparing students for the independent research they undertake in the capstone. This concern was identified in our annual assessment meetings.

The professional development modules were added with the help of career services in response to student exit surveys.

Looking forward

Please summarize your department's focus for student development and your evaluation methods.

Our primary goal for our students is for them to develop and carry out an independent research project. Successful completion of this project requires them to formulate a research question, familiarize themselves with the scholarly literature, create a research design, identify the appropriate evidence, analyze the evidence and interpret the results.

The two primary forms of evaluation are (1) an assessment meeting in which we grade and discuss the research projects, as well as (2) student exit surveys, in which the students tell us about their experience in the major and the research sequence.

Achieving departmental goals for students

Please explain how your departmental curriculum achieves your student learning goals, being sure to include the Capstone. Feel free to attach a curricular map or other supporting documents. Summarize the ways your department provides guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

The Issues in Politics (100) course introduces the student to the subfields of political science, as well as some methods of analysis. The methods courses (201/202) introduce the student to either empirical normative methods of analysis. The analyzing politics (303) courses require the student to delve into the literature and a variety of research questions in a thematic area, such as global governance or executive authority. Finally, the capstone experience develops writing, analytical and oral presentation skills.

Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students

Please explain how your departmental learning goals contribute to the Vision for Student Learning Goals. Feel free to attach a map or other supporting documents.

Our research sequence is carefully designed to facilitate the College's goal of helping students to "rigorously investigate and research these underlying causes and connections, learn to synthesize evidence from multiple sources, and design ways to answer their questions. They acquire the skills to evaluate arguments and evidence critically and develop independent, nuanced, and thoughtful analyses."

Internships, study abroad and Odyssey projects (which are not only encouraged but in some cases required of our majors) allow students to "bring their experiences in the wider community back to the classroom to enhance their course of study".

The professional development modules in the capstone experience "provide tools and opportunities to prepare our students for their prospective professional lives".

The requirement that they give feedback to each other at various points in the research sequence illustrates that we "strive to inspire them to lead lives of accomplishment as both leaders and team members".