Central Washington University  
Assessment of Student Learning  
Department and Program Report

Please enter the appropriate information concerning your student learning assessment activities for this year.

Academic Year of Report: 2009-10* College: Sciences
Department: Political Science Program: BA (large & small)

* Fall, 2009-Winter, 2010 due to report deadline of 6/14 (may file an amended return in Sept.)

I. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?
In answering this question, please identify the specific student learning outcomes you assessed this year, reasons for assessing these outcomes, with the outcomes written in clear, measurable terms, and note how the outcomes are linked to department, college and university mission and goals.

1. Outcome: Students will demonstrate an ability to explain the basic concepts and facts in each of the 4 sub-fields of the discipline (American, Comparative, International, and Theory/Philosophy). This outcome relates to the Program Goal of “transmit knowledge (of the field) to others”; the College goal of “providing for an outstanding academic life in COTS”; and the University goal of “providing for an outstanding academic life at the Ellensburg campus.” The reason it was selected is that we believe all students should have at least a reasonable familiarity with and command of the basic, core concepts that make up the sub-fields of the discipline, which is divided into four major parts (and relate to 4 of the 5 core required courses in the field (the other, Political Science 101, is mainly an introduction to the whole field and the idea of politics in general.) Thus, all graduating political science majors, no matter their area of interest or pursuit of advanced courses through their electives, should know the basic building blocks and knowledge of the field.

2. Outcome: Students will acquire the analytical tools and skills used in the discipline (and demonstrate it). This outcome relates to the Program Goals of: “transmit knowledge to others” and “encourage, through pedagogical means, a real interest in politics”; the College goals of “provide an outstanding academic life” and “create, sustain civil and diverse workplace”; and the University Goals of “providing for an outstanding academic life at the Ellensburg campus.” The reason it was selected is that we believe that, after four years as a political science major, students should learn and be able to use the analytical, research, question-asking-and-answering skills utilized in political science, albeit at a much lower level. In other words, we would not expect that they would all be able to do original political science research (both in terms of questions and data collection/analysis) at the caliber of graduate students or professors in the field, for example, but that they should be able to craft a basic research question, using secondary materials and data and other smart, well-educated people’s findings, to show they can think and craft an argument, apply political science models, etc. (See next outcome below, as well.) Indeed, this is a key aspect of their ability to think for themselves and think critically about politics.
3. Outcome: *Students will demonstrate familiarity and competence with scholarly resources and be able to use these to carry out a basic research paper in the discipline.* Again, this outcome relates to the Program Goals of: “transmit knowledge to others” and “encourage, through pedagogical means, a real interest in politics”; the College goals of “provide an outstanding academic life” and “create, sustain civil and diverse workplace”; and the University Goals of “providing for an outstanding academic life at the Ellensburg campus.” The reason it was selected is that, naturally, in order for political science majors to effectively utilize the analytical skills and tools of the field, they also have to have basic information literacy with the accepted subject matter of the field. Thus, they should be able to show they know – through actual use and practice in a paper – how to find, gather, absorb, use and reference accepted scholarly (or at least quality) materials to support arguments or sides in topical controversies in the field, such as they would do in research papers in the upper-level courses. We would hope that after four (or at least two) years of exposure to such in their coursework, they would know how to do this. Furthermore, this is an important skill and competence acquisition: to be able to tell wheat from the chaff when it comes to political (and political science/scholarly) information.

**Measure: how many papers actually used scholarly resources?**

4. Additional Note on Overall Quality and Effect of Major Education: Not specific outcome per-se…

As with last year, we would like to report on an additional measures of how students evaluated their (major) education.

5. *How students views on politics changed/were influenced by their major career.* This also is not a formal outcome, but is measured through our exit survey. Since the feedback asked for also some measure of their acquiring “attitudes” of the field (which we still don’t understand), we thought we would at least report it here to show that we have done something (actually, since we started the survey around 2001).

II. How were they assessed?

In answering these questions, please concisely describe the specific methods used in assessing student learning. Please also specify the population assessed, when the assessment took place, and the standard of mastery (criterion) against which you will compare your assessment results. If appropriate, please list survey or questionnaire response rate from total population.

A) What methods were used?

B) Who was assessed?

C) When was it assessed?

1. Outcome: *Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic concepts and facts in each of the 4 sub-fields of the discipline (American, Comparative, International, Theory/Philosophy).*

   A1) Methods: To assess mastery of these concepts, all students must take a Senior Assessment Exit Examination, which is a 4-part exam consisting of 50 short-answer questions (worth 2 points each) designed by the department and based on basic knowledge in the required four “introduction to the subfield” courses of POSC 210 (American), 260 (Comparative), 270 (International) and Theory (student’s choice of 481 (Ancient), 482 (Early Modern), 483
(Contemporary) and 485 (American) Political Thought, respectively. Students collectively are graded out of the 100 total points, which is one-half of their grade in the course (the other half from their research paper); together, they must get a “C-“ in the course to graduate. Three faculty members: the instructor and two who have expertise in respective sub-fields (parts of the test) grade the exam and the score is averaged between the two (sets) of professors.

Therefore, our minimum expectation is a 70 on the exam (and indeed, such had been the average from 2001-05.); 80 or higher would be above expectation, and 60 or lower, below. Of course, we would note that we’re dealing with adults here, who must decide they will drink after being led to water.

Note: this is at the end; individual instructors assess the acquisition of such knowledge in core courses through their own assessment regimes.

B1) Population: Senior Majors, in the last 1-2 quarters, in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course (a 2-credit hour course).

C1) Timeframe: At the end of their career, as noted above.

→ Continued Added Wrinkle for Outcome #1: Non-equivalent samples pre-test/post-test design with students in Political Science 101 sections. (Second year of this study)

A2) Method: As implemented last year, we created and administered a “pre-test” quiz of ten questions, from all 4 sub-fields and even two general questions (one asking them to define “politics,” and the other asking them to identify the 2 US Senators from Washington State, a basic political knowledge question) to students in the Political Science 101 course (all sections of Fall and Winter Quarters) on the first 1-2 days. (Students were told they would get extra credit for right answers). These same questions - at least, 9 of the 10 - were included on the exams given to students in the 489 course. We then compiled and compared these results.

B2) Population: Students in 101 (mostly frosh, but some others, including even poli sci majors…) “versus” Senior Majors

C2) Timeframe: 101 students at beginning of class; Seniors at the end of their career

2. Outcome: Students will acquire analytical tools and skills used in the discipline (and demonstrate it).

A) Methods: Students write a major research paper of 10-12 pages. The students have two options: to make a major revision to a paper they have already submitted for work in the department, or to choose a new topic (around the loose subject of arguing for/against some proposed reform to the US political system). The paper is evaluated based on the degree to which they can ask appropriate questions, make an analytical argument backed by evidence, and communicate effectively. The goal is for the majority of students to get a “B” (80-percentile) or higher; 2001-05 average has been a B-. Generally, an “A” (or 90-100) paper shows a strong argument with thesis, an analysis backed up with valid evidence, and written/presented clearly; B (80s) shows some degree of analysis and application, though thesis and/or evidence was weak, along with writing issues; C (or 70s) is mostly descriptive, with little or no analysis and use of evidence to make an argument; and D is a weak argument or rant with virtually no evidence, etc. An F is given when the topic is inappropriate or student fails to complete the assignment in a timely fashion.
B) Population: Senior Majors, in the last 1-2 quarters, in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course (a 2-credit hour course all must take to graduate).
C) Timeframe: At the end of their career, as noted above.

3. Outcome: Students will demonstrate familiarity and competence with scholarly resources and be able to use these to carry out a basic research paper in the discipline.
   Note: See previous year’s report. This was not assessed this year, because instructors for each of the sections didn’t keep records on this per se, just paper evaluations.

4. Misc. Outcome: Educational Quality of Program/Degree
   A) Method: Question on senior exit survey, “Do you feel your education in political science here at CWU prepared you well for the future, whether study in graduate school in political science or another field, or a job/profession?”; close ended-question: would you recommend this major/dept. to an incoming freshman?
   B) Population: Senior Majors, in the last 1-2 quarters, in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course
   C) Timeframe: at the end of their career. (Must answer survey to avoid “I” grade)

5. Misc. Outcome: Student Views of Politics
   A) Method: Open-ended question on the senior exit survey, “How have your views about politics changed, if any, over your college career? Interpret this question as broadly as you like.”

   B) Population: Senior Majors, in the last 1-2 quarters, in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course
   C) Timeframe: at the end of their career. (Must answer survey to avoid “I” grade)

III. What was learned?
In answering this question, please report results in specific qualitative or quantitative terms, with the results linked to the outcomes you assessed, and compared to the standard of mastery (criterion) you noted above. Please also include a concise interpretation or analysis of the results.

1. Outcome: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic concepts and facts in each of the 4 sub-fields of the discipline (American, Comparative, International, Theory/Philosophy).

   Findings (Fall 09-Winter10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds Expectation (80+)</th>
<th>Met Expectation (70-9)</th>
<th>Below Expectation (60s-)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%:</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Note: Out of 100 points possible, 50 short-answer questions worth 2 points each. Students in Winter and Spring quarters took two, 25-question exams over 2 subfields plus general political knowledge, respectively, as opposed to one test over 4 with 50 questions (Fall, and previous years). The Department, at suggestion of some students and faculty, believed this might help break up the material, length, and fatigue, and improve performance. Thus, their scores on two exams were combined and included.

On this measure, as with last year we find that roughly three-fourths of the students do meet or exceed expectation, at least based on relative terms with past years; indeed, this set achieved an average score of 83, about ten points higher than previous years. This shows strong improvement, but admittedly is based on a small sample and omits the larger numbers who take the course in the Spring (due to graduation, etc.), and thus it may be unrepresentative. Still, it looks good…

Findings – “Pre-test/Post-test” Comparison with 101 Students:

On this measure, we once again found our students knew more than those entering students in 101 (though notably, about 25% have taken at least one political science course before that one). Again, there was variation on each of the questions, but the average score a student in the 101 class would receive was 2.07, or basically, 10% (2/20 possible points); for our own majors, if we count all points, it was 12.6, or 63%, a substantially greater (but still not great) number. However, this includes questions that were skipped by the seniors, as they are allowed a small degree of choice the questions (the 101 students are not, though it is an “extra credit” pre-test). If we only count the questions the students chose to answer – i.e., took the average score of the Senior Assessment students, per question, and then totaled the result as if it were an exam, they received a higher score of 15.6, or 78 percent. Using this measure, we can also see that the average score per question was .2 for the 101 students, and 1.6 for the Senior Assessment students, out of two. We plan to continue this experiment for another year, and thus have enough data to do statistical comparisons by total score and by question.

2. Outcome: Students will acquire analytical tools and skills used in the discipline (and demonstrate it).

Findings (Fall 09-Winter10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advanced (90+)</th>
<th>Proficient (80s)</th>
<th>Minimally Proficient (70s)</th>
<th>Not Proficient (60-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%:</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*three students failed to hand in an outline and/or paper and failed the course before being allowed to take the exam; two re-took the course, and are included, the other did not and so is not included.

For the period under review, all students achieved the minimum level, but if we use the “analytical standard” (of a “B” or higher), then one-half of our students did, which was lower than
last year. Still, it does not seem terrible to us. Indeed, writing in general is something that the Department plans to take up in the future (see below).

3. Outcome: Students will demonstrate familiarity and competence with scholarly resources and be able to use these to carry out a basic research paper in the discipline.

Findings:
Note: See previous year’s report. This was not assessed this year, because instructors for each of the sections didn’t keep records on this per se, just paper evaluations.

4. Outcome: Educational Quality of their Degree
One of the items on the exit survey (which we’ve asked since 2001) was an open-ended question on whether students felt that “education they received at CWU prepared them well for their future” either in grad school or a job. On this measure, 80% said unequivocally “yes” or some equivalent; 20% said maybe” (in some form, like “yes and no” etc., or it was unclear) and none (0%) clearly responded no or negatively. This is close to last year’s finding and shows general strong satisfaction with the value of the degree, though again, the small sample size leads one to not want to put too much into these findings.

5. Outcome: Effect of the Political Science Major “Experience” on their Political Views and Values
One really needs to read these open-ended comments to get a feel for them, and they are very difficult to quantify. But in a nutshell, almost all of our students say that their major educational experience has taught them much and led them to reflect on, or develop, their political views and values, even if it didn’t change them (and this bunch had more saying it changed them.)

IV. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?
In answering this question, please note specific changes to your program as they affect student learning, and as they are related to results from the assessment process. If no changes are planned, please describe why no changes are needed. In addition, how will the department report the results and changes to internal and external constituents (e.g., advisory groups, newsletters, forums, etc.).

The Department also has decided, due to general dissatisfaction with writing in upper-division courses, and due to the University’s current emphasis on writing assessment in general education (notably, we also have two “W” courses in that program), that we are going to undertake some kind of revision to writing-within-the-curriculum, especially in the upper division courses. We may also attempt to enforce some kind of standard writing format, and at the very least, citation format, starting in “W” core/general education courses like 101 or 270.

The department may also consider handing out a common “how to do a paper” set of materials in to improve research and writing. One faculty member has developed a basic rubric and others have educational “how to write” materials that we may start assigning in many classes. All of this will have to be discussed, designed, and implemented next year (or perhaps, actually implemented the year after if agreement cannot be reached.)

We also are going to move forward with discussions and the possibility of having pre-requisites for upper-division classes, particularly our “W” ones and possibly others such as in English.
V. What did the department or program do in response to last year’s assessment information?

In answering this question, please describe any changes that have been made to improve student learning based on previous assessment results. Please also discuss any changes you have made to your assessment plan or assessment methods.

To provide a “baseline” measure of student knowledge to provide more context and comparison with the exit exam, the Department administered a “pretest” to students in the Political Science 101 course (mentioned above). Namely, we took ten of the common, basic questions all instructors in each subfield and core course believe are essential, which already were in our Assessment course test bank so to speak, and gave a short exam to students in six different 101 sections on the first 2-3 days of the class. While not graded, the responses to these questions from 101 were compared to identical items on the 489 exam. As noted above, we did see that graduating seniors scored more highly (70% to 11%) than students in 101. The Department examined certain questions from each of the sub-fields to see if there were any patterns, but the sample size was so small it was decided to wait until at least 2 (if not 3) years’ worth of data to draw any conclusions. Instructors in the core courses, however, did say that they would attempt to emphasize the common concepts we test for at the end, and possibly include them in their own exams.

The other change we made was to the Senior Exit Survey. We altered two questions which asked students to comment (positively, or negatively) on specific faculty members. This was seen as not overly useful or at least not actionable in terms of improvement. So, we altered the wording of the questions so as to parallel two others that we ask on a quantitative scale: to comment on the “quality of instruction and facilitation of learning” in the department, and the “openness and accessibility of the department.”

The other change was to have representatives of Career Services come and talk to students in the Senior Assessment course. It might be too late, but better than never...

VI. Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University:

I am reiterating below some of my concerns from last year. I would also note that I responded to your feedback from 07-08 about why we don’t assess “attitudes and dispositions” of majors (mainly because we don’t train them to be political scientists, as most never go to grad school), and yet again it appeared on the feedback to last year’s (08-09) report. Please explain what you mean by “attitudes and beliefs necessary for success in the political science discipline.” By my way of thinking, there are no core values, at least, not directly as these would infringe on academic and political freedom. Are they supposed to acquire these? Come to the major with them? And if we knew, how would we measure them? I did attempt to address it up above, RE: our survey item asking them if their views about politics have changed, etc., which we have asked since 2001 and were reported in our Program Review (06-07).
-Please make the deadline a little later – like, perhaps June 30, or at least one week after graduation. With all of the end-of-the-year stuff, this is a hard thing to do, especially trying to include Spring information. *The quality of the report likely suffers as a result.*

Please be clearer in what you want in and from the report; some of the feedback I received last year could’ve been dealt with if I’d known more what information you wanted. I unfortunately didn’t have much time to look at last year.

Again, there is some concern within our department that assessment, if taken to an extreme, may infringe upon academic freedom, which is far from an abstract concept in political science. We also question the assumption that if students don’t “learn” it is somehow the faculty or the program’s fault, when we are dealing with adults: i.e., again there is the *flawed assumption that students want to learn*, especially given the admissions standards at this University.