1. **What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?**

Consistent with POSC’s previously submitted SLOP, the 2014-2015 report assessed performance on the department’s Outcome Five: “Understand/demonstrate the writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation” of Public Administration scholarship at the graduate level. This relates to the university’s Strategic Plan Outcome 1.1.1: “Students will achieve programmatic learning outcomes.” The reason this outcome was chosen to assess is that it has not been previously assessed and represents the key scholarship capabilities expected of a successful graduate of our program.

2. **How were the student learning outcomes assessed?**
   
   **A) What methods were used?**

   The methods that were used, again following our SLOP criteria, were analyses of the specific standards of mastery stated in Outcomes Five that “an average of 70% of the students will score a B+ or better across focused courses.” This was a direct assessment that measured both performance and competency. The focused courses selected for 2014-2015 academic year were Sociology 501 (Social Science Research Methods), Political Science 595 (Directed Research), and Political Science 700 (Master’s Thesis/Examination). Performance and knowledge in these courses was directly assessed using the grade/evaluation of both the examination and writing projects/products required in each of the courses. Instructors of each course reported on the final grade distribution of these courses over the 2014-2015 academic year. The POSC 595 and POSC 700 courses evaluated the final research papers and oral presentations that constituted each student’s Capstone Project for completion of the degree requirements.

As a general rule of thumb, the program considers “A” work to be that which meets or exceeds the 90th percentile and exhibits a superior grasp of the course content, as well as superior skills of oral articulation and proficiency in written content and style. Of course for POSC 595 and POSC 700 there are expectations of mastery in thesis construction, research project design, data compilation, analysis and evaluation, as well as clarity in written and oral expression of research findings. In a similar vein, “B” work is considered that which meets or exceeds the 80th percentile, exhibits adequate competency and knowledge, but without those subtle insights and abilities that would cause the work to stand out. “C” work is that which meets the bare minimum of subject competency, written expression and verbal...
articulation. Anything below “C”-level work is considered unacceptable in the graduate program.

An additional method used, not mentioned in our SLOP, was an indirect attitudinal measure. This was a response to a question on the Completion of Program questionnaire completed at the end of their program of study, “Do you believe that you personally and professionally benefited from the MS-PA academic program at CWU?”

B) Who was assessed?

The student population assessed was the 20-student cohort from Liuzhou City, Guangxi Province, People’s Republic of China. This has been a dedicated contract program for the last five years and all 20 students participated in all three of the focused courses. This cohort constituted the entire graduate student body enrolled in the MS-PA program at the time. All 20 students successfully completed each of the three focus courses. SOC 501 course did not assign a final research paper writing assignment, but both POSC 595 and POSC 700 required major writing projects for successful completion of each course.

The population for the Completion of Program questionnaire was 20 students. The response rate for the questionnaire was 100%.

C) When was it assessed?

The periodic assessment was the final grade earned during the term for each of the three focus courses – SOC 501: Fall 2014; POSC 595 and POSC 700: Summer 2015. The end of program assessment was the Capstone Project research project submitted at the end of their summer courses (POSC 595 & POSC 700), in late July, 2015. The Completion of Program questionnaire was administered at the conclusion of the Spring Quarter, 2015.

3. What was learned?

The results of the assessment demonstrate that the students showed excellent performance across the focused courses surveyed. This performance is particularly impressive given that all of the students are non-native English speakers, using a second language and pursuing an advanced degree in a foreign cultural setting, far removed from their traditional support networks. All of these students are mid-career professionals, most of whom have been out of a university environment for many years. In most instances, these students have never been outside of China before, so the culture shock is a significant factor for them.

Student performance in Sociology 501, as measured by final grades achieved clearly indicates mastery of the course content. The same may be inferred from performance in POSC 595 and POSC 700.
Assessment (Final Grade): | A’s | A-’s | B+’s | B’s | Total |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOC 501</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>POSC 595</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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Also, a stated goal of the program’s Outcome Five is that, “All students submit a formal written report or analysis to support their oral presentation,” as a central part of their Capstone Project.

Assessment (Final Grade): “S”

POSC 700 | 20

The stated target of Outcome Five for the program is that “An average of 70% or better of the students will score a B+ or better across the focused courses.” The data clearly demonstrate that 95% of students scored at B+ or better in terms of their final grades on the first two of the focused courses and all achieved an “S” level on their final capstone projects submitted for POSC 700. From this data it seems clear that almost all of our students achieved more or less complete mastery of the subject matter and requirements of the three focused courses assessed during the 2014-2015 academic year. From the data I believe that we can safely say that the standards of mastery were met in almost all cases under review for this report.

As to responses obtained from the Completion of Program questionnaire, “Do you believe that you personally and professionally benefited from the MS-PA academic program while at CWU?” we detect a uniformly positive or affirmative set of student responses. While this is an open-ended question that may lack total objectivity, it is rather easy to note from responses that students feel genuine personal and professional benefit from the program, in some cases to the extent that it is a truly transformative experience in their lives. In scoring these responses the Program Director personally reviewed them and marked them either positive or negative. There were NO negative comments (even though the questionnaire is anonymous). In part this may be viewed through a cultural lens in which Chinese students are usually loathe to negatively criticize their “hosts,” but the responses seem borne out by the day-to-day interactions with the student, both in an out of the classroom environment. Having personally taught Chinese students for decades and been in China MANY times, it is my informed professional opinion that the students are overwhelmingly positive about their academic program here and view it as an essential enhancement to their professional career trajectories.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

The program faculty will meet in Spring Quarter to discuss potential changes to the programs curriculum and organization based upon the data generated by this report. According to their final grades, program completion rates (100%) so far, and expressions of program satisfaction on the Completion of Program questionnaire, the overall program is strongly meeting the goals that
the faculty have set for the MS-PA program. One can always improve, but the data supports the conclusion that the program is strong and meets the needs and expectations of the students and faculty both. However, the faculty is aware of the significant challenge of helping our students meet the requirements or proficiency in spoken and written English as well as the specific expertise needed for non-native speakers to speak and write it at the graduate, social science level. We are engaged in an ongoing process of reforming our individual and collective methods used in helping the students improve their language abilities at an accelerated rate. We will discuss potential strategies related to writing challenges at this meeting as well as at a planned program retreat in May to address these concerns in terms of potential reform strategies and collaboration on developing student writing skills. This is an area that we know needs improvement and so the POSC 560 course (Comparative Public Policy) is being re-tasked this year to force the students to conceptualize and design their final capstone projects a term earlier than previously required. It is hoped that this will reduce the student and faculty stress levels experienced during the summer session with POSC 595 and POSC 700.

We also recognize that the Completion of Program questionnaire needs to be “tightened up” with the crafting of less pen-ended questions, probably utilizing Likert scaling techniques as a way of teasing out more objective data related to program satisfaction and student learning.

We will of course share our findings with key campus stakeholders such as the Dean of COTS and Dean of Graduate Studies. Unfortunately, this program as originally conceived and operated (as a dedicated contract program with Liuzhou City) will not be continued after the 205-2016 academic year, so sharing our findings with the City officials will no longer be necessary. We are already in the process of trying to reconfigure the program to fit the needs of a domestic student constituency.

5. What did the department or program do in response to previous years’ assessment results, and what was the effect of those changes?

Last year the program faculty met to discuss ways to improve and expedite the process of student selection of their Capstone Project with the goal of getting the students started earlier on choosing a topic, proposing their thesis statements and beginning the process of data collection. Evidence from the previous year indicated that students and faculty were overburdened by not starting their Capstone Projects until the conclusion of the Spring Quarter. This led to students trying to do too much in too short of a time frame. Because of the requirement of the Liuzhou contract that all students must complete their program by the end of Summer Session (August), there was a frenzy of activity to insure that everything was accomplished on time. As a result of our discussions, the decision was made to require the students to select a topic and begin the process of data collection during the Spring Quarter itself. While this helped relieve the problem somewhat, we have since decided to re-task the POSC 560 (Comparative Public Policy) course to force a beginning to that process even earlier this year.

Since our entire department is going through program review this academic year, we believe we should wait until hearing the assessments of the external reviewers before undertaking further changes. In addition, with the failure of the university to extend the Liuzhou contract, there will likely be considerable revisions coming over the course of the next year to recalibrate the
program to serve primarily domestic students. For example, it is now unlikely that language skills will be such a major factor in the delivery of the curriculum and the pacing of the research projects.

6. Questions or suggestions? Contact Tom Henderson (henderst@cwu.edu) or Bret Smith (bpsmith@cwu.edu)

Thank you for your patience in reviewing this report. I look forward to any questions or comments concerning the materials presented here.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Launius
Professor of Political Science &
Director, MS-PA Program
Department of Political Science