SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program Name (no acronyms): Political Science	Department: Political Science
Degree or Certificate Level: B.A.	College/School: Arts and Sciences
Date (Month/Year): September 2022	Assessment Contact: Dr. Steven Rogers

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? Academic year 2021-22

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2019

Is this program accredited by an external program/disciplinary/specialized accrediting organization? no

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle? (Please list the full, complete learning outcome statements and not just numbers, e.g., Outcomes 1 and 2.)

Outcome 1: Students will be able to identify the structure and operation of political systems in the U.S, across a variety of countries, and in multinational organizations.

Outcome 4: Students will be able to identify and gather information from credible primary and secondary sources.

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please describe the artifacts in detail and identify the course(s) in which they were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

For outcome 1, instructors in six 1000 and 2000-level courses collected artifacts. Those courses were: POLS 1150 American Political Systems, POLS 2100 The American Constitution, POLS 2590 Politics of the Middle East, POLS 2600 Introduction to International Political Economy, and POLS 2820 American Foreign Policy. One class from Madrid was included: POLS 2640 International Terrorism. To assess student learning, instructors relied on exam or test questions, essays, a research design, student presentations, answers to questions posted on Canvas. Since this outcome focuses on factual knowledge and an ability to see how political structures work, short essays and other kinds of exam questions completed in lower-level courses are good measures of student learning.

For outcome 4, instructors in nine 3000 and 4000-level courses collected artifacts. Those courses were: POLS 3130 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, POLS 3770 Feminist Theory: Gender Justice; POLS 3930 American Political Movements, POLS 4300 Law, Politics, and Regulatory Policy, POLS 4340 Issues in Public Policy, and POLS 4740 Marx's *Capital*. In Madrid, the courses were POLS 3567 Political Development in Contemporary Spain (two sections) and POLS 3630 International Security and Conflict Resolution. Instructors relied on exam or test questions, essays, a research paper, class discussions, group projects, and student presentations. Given that this outcome measures ability to gather information from credible sources, a variety of types of projects provide good indicators of learning.

Previous templates for assessment reports did not ask for detailed information about artifacts, so we had no reason to collect that information this year. We plan to do so in the future.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and **include them in/with this report document** (please do not just refer to the assessment plan).

Instructors completed a rubric for each student majoring in Political Science. Rubrics are attached to this report. Instructors shared a summary of those rubrics through a Qualtrics survey that answered the below questions:

1) For which class are you providing information?

2) This year, we agreed to examine this learning outcome [Outcome 1: Students will be able to identify the structure and operation of political systems in the U.S, across a variety of countries, and in multinational organizations OR Outcome 4: Students will be able to identify and gather information from credible primary and secondary sources.] You can determine whether or not students achieved this outcome according to the goals of your class. How did your class contribute to this goal?

3) Which of these instruments did you use to assess student learning for this report? (check all that apply)
   a) One or more essays
   b) One or more exam or test questions
   c) A research design
   d) Other, describe
   e) A research paper

4) Did you fill in a rubric for each Political Science major in the class?

5) In the matrix below, please summarize what you found from the rubrics. For each of the eight outcomes on the rubric, please provide the number of Political Science majors who did not meet, met but did not exceed, or exceeded expectations.
   [Components of the attached rubrics were listed in a matrix]

6) Overall, what could majors do well in regard to [outcome wording inserted here]?

7) Overall, what could majors do less well in regard to [outcome wording inserted here]?

8) How did Political Science majors compare to students from other departments in terms of being able to [outcome wording inserted here]?

9) What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to [outcome wording inserted here]?

10) Do you have suggestions for changing the BA curriculum or approaches in individual courses in order to make sure that students will be able to to [outcome wording inserted here]?

11) Is there anything you want to add about your students' learning?

12) Do you have any comments to improve this reporting process?

The survey questions are presented here in general form. There were two separate surveys, each one tailored to the outcome for which responses were being collected.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

Summary results for outcome 1

Student is able to:	Does not meet expectations	Meets (but does not exceed) expectations	Exceeds expectations	Outcome does not apply to this course
US				
Describe how political institutions operate to produce laws and policies	STL: 22 students	STL: 17 students	STL: 12 students	STL: 21 Madrid: 25
Explain the function of key institutions	STL: 22	STL: 16	1 STL: 3	STL: 21 Madrid: 25
Identify how policy outcomes are affected by institutional structures	STL: 17 Madrid: 5	STL: 18 Madrid: 13	STL: 16 Madrid: 7	STL: 21
Comparative				
Describe how political institutions operate to produce laws and policies	STL: 7	STL: 25	STL: 5	STL: 36 Madrid: 25
Explain the function of key institutions	STL: 6	STL: 23	STL: 8	STL: 36 Madrid: 25
Identify how policy outcomes are affected by institutional structures	STL: 7 M: 6	STL: 24 M: 12	STL: 6 M: 9	STL: 36
Distinguish between authoritarian and democratic institutions and their underlying values	STL: 4 M: 3	STL: 17 M: 5	STL: 6 M: 17	STL: 47
Multinational organizations				
Describe how international institutions operate	STL: 2 M: 4	STL: 7 M: 9	STL: 2 M: 12	STL: 61
Explain the function of key international institutions	STL: 2 M: 3	STL: 6 M: 4	STL: 3 M: 18	STL: 61
Identify how outcomes are affected by institutional structures	STL: 2 M: 3	STL: 6 M: 5	STL: 3 M: 17	STL: 61

Instructors reported that students generally did well in terms of the following:
- Describing how political institutions operate to produce laws and policies
- Explaining the function of key institutions in federal and state governments, in foreign policy making
- Understanding important characteristics of the US foreign policy-making process
- Distinguishing among different types of institutions
- Identifying real-world examples of how specific structures and policies preceded certain outcomes, for instance how power-sharing structures preceded civil wars in Lebanon
- Describing the main properties of the international trade system

- Explaining why countries chose different trade and development regimes
- Identifying the role of domestic political systems and policies in financial crises
- Assessing how the financial crises and post-crisis reforms affected the growth of inequality

Students faced more challenges in terms of the following:
- Identifying how policy outcomes are affected by institutional structures in the US
- Describing how institutions operate to produce laws and policies in the US
- Completing assignments
- Understanding functions of US government agencies in the planning and execution of foreign policy interests
- Separating value judgments from distinctions between "democracy" and "autocracy." They tend to assume that outcomes they consider good must come from democratic institutions and vice versa.
- Articulating causal theories about why specific institutional structures lead to certain outcomes
- Overgeneralizing from single cases
- Understanding topics that require more background in economics
- Mastering basic writing skills

Instructors identified a variety of tactics that enhanced students' ability to identify the structure and operation of political systems:
- Study guides and quizzes
- Group work bridged the gap between very strong students and those who were struggling
- Repetition of key concepts, logic, institutions, processes
- Assign each student to study a country in depth and present on it to the class
- Questions in class about information in the textbook
- Discussions of current news and events helps make theoretical information more concrete
- Assign a variety of types of materials (journal articles, newspapers, documentaries, podcasts, movies)

Summary results for outcome 4:

Student is able to:	Does not meet expectations	Meets (but does not exceed) expectations	Exceeds expectations	Outcome does not apply to this course
Identify needed information	STL: 11 Madrid: 5	STL: 52 Madrid: 9	STL: 28 Madrid: 15	STL: 0 Madrid: 0
Distinguish between factual evidence, arguments, and analysis	STL: 7 M: 5	STL: 45 M: 10	STL: 27 M: 14	STL: 10 M: 0
Identify how the context within which primary sources were created affects the source	STL: 4 M: 7	STL: 44 M: 8	STL: 20 M: 10	STL: 21 M: 0
Assess the purpose of the source's creator and its impact on the credibility of the source	STL: 5 M: 5	STL: 42 M: 9	STL: 21 M: 15	STL: 21 M: 0
Distinguish scholarly from non-scholarly sources	STL: 1 M: 2	STL: 14 M: 10	STL: 20 M: 17	STL: 54 M: 0
Judge whether a source is considered credible in an academic or policy context	STL: 3 M: 3	STL: 26 M: 8	STL: 28 M: 8	STL: 32 M: 10
Cite sources properly	STL: 6 M: 0	STL: 60 M: 12	STL: 13 M: 17	STL: 10 M: 0

Instructors reported that students generally did well in terms of the following:
- Culling relevant information from primary sources
- Reading more than once, ask for help, and integrate input so that they eventually understood what they read
- Identifying the difference between primary and secondary texts
- Analyzing the credibility of a source
- Understanding the influence of legal advocacy on the credibility of sources and the types of arguments made in legal documents

Students faced more challenges in terms of the following:
- Marshalling textual evidence from philosophical sources to support a coherent argument
- Close reading of challenging texts
- Identifying key points and how other points relate to those
- Retaining and applying definitions
- Identifying and applying key distinctions
- Identifying alternative sources, for instance non-Western narratives
- Identifying the historical and institutional factors that affect a source
- Identifying the differences between factual evidence, arguments, and analysis

Instructors identified a variety of tactics that enhanced students' ability to identify and gather information from credible primary and secondary sources:
- Multiple drafts of short essays, reviewed first by the instructor and then by peers, using a common rubric
- Group projects that required students to work independently and present to the class
- Providing students with an array of secondary sources so that they do not need to seek them out
- Requiring a short precis of reading material for each class
- Clear explanations of each type of source on the syllabus
- Requiring students to answer questions on Canvas before coming to class

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions
What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

Outcome 1
For an external audience, it is worth noting that most political sciences classes cover American politics, politics of countries other than the US (comparative politics), or international relations – not all three at once. The classes included in this analysis mostly covered one of those topics, hence the relatively large number of "does not apply to this course" answers.

Most students met or exceeded objectives in terms of understanding the operation of comparative or multinational organizations. Overall, between 80 and 87 percent of students met or exceeded objectives in the comparative politics category. In Madrid, the percentages ranged from 78 percent to 88 percent; in St. Louis, from 81 to 85 percent. Overall results were equally strong in terms of knowledge of multinational organizations where between 83 and 86 percent of students met or exceeded objectives. The range was higher in Madrid (84-88 percent) than in Saint Louis (81-82 percent).

Results were less strong in the US politics category where two instructors reported that substantial numbers of their students failed to meet expectations. Overall, between 69 and 71 percent met or exceeded expectations. In Madrid, where classes only addressed one US category on the rubric, 80 percent of students met or exceeded expectations. The two instructors who reported larger numbers of struggling students observed that first and second year students are struggling emotionally and academically more than students who started their undergraduate career in person or finished high school before the pandemic. Although course expectations had not changed, students had more

difficulty meeting them. It is also possible that the variation in meeting expectations is in part the product of different modes of measuring achievement. The instructor of one of the lower achieving classes filled in rubrics based on specific questions on the midterm and final exams, a type of artifact where gaps in knowledge may be more apparent than in an oral presentation or an essay. In addition, that class was populated almost entirely by first-year students, without the balancing effect of more advanced students.

Two instructors reported that Political Science majors performed better than students from other departments. Five instructors reported that majors and students from other departments performed about the same. This is not surprising in lower-level classes, where even majors may come to class with little background. In these classes, it can be difficult to identify which student are or will become majors since they have not yet made final decisions.

Conclusion: Overall, the results do not indicate a need to majorly revise the curriculum, but there is reason to think about approaches in various classes. Tactics that instructors found useful in their own classes are listed in question 4 and possible changes in approach are listed in question 6B. These points could be usefully discussed by the department as a whole. In addition, it is worth addressing some of the issues raised in the qualitative responses. Specifically, the department might address:
- Challenges students face in articulating causal theories and drawing inferences from cases
- Weaknesses in basic academic skills like completing assignments and writing coherent essays
- Ways to help younger cohorts overcome the challenges of pandemic disruptions.

Outcome 4
Most students met or exceeded objectives in terms of identifying and gathering information from primary and secondary sources. Saint Louis students were particularly skilled at distinguishing scholarly from non-scholarly sources (97 percent) and judging whether a source is credible (95 percent). Fewer Madrid than St. Louis students met or exceeded expectations on some measures: identifying needed information (83 percent to 89 percent); distinguishing between factual evidence, arguments, and analysis (83 to 91 percent); identifying how context affects primary sources (72 percent to 94 percent); assessing the purpose of the source's creator and its impact on the credibility of the source (83 percent to 93 percent). But 100 percent of Madrid student could cite sources correctly, whereas 92 percent of St. Louis students met or exceeded this goal. Given the comparatively much smaller number of Madrid students involved in this part of the analysis, it is not clear that any conclusions can be drawn from the relatively small differences in student learning between the two campuses.

Two instructors reported difficulty identifying whether students in their classes were Political Science majors or not. Of those who could make that identification, 3 reported that Political Science majors performed better than the other students in the class; 2 reported that all students performed roughly the same; and 1 reported that Political Science majors performed worse (specifically worse than Philosophy majors in a Political Thought class). The assessment director forgot to send instructors lists of majors in their classes and will do better in this regard in the future. Since the skills involved in identifying and gathering information from primary and secondary sources are not unique to Political Science majors, it is not surprising that many instructors do not observe large differences between majors and non-majors in this regard.

Conclusion: Given that most students met or exceeded expectations, there seems to be little need to make curricular changes. In their qualitative responses, instructors reported student challenges in regard to reading and understanding difficult primary materials, especially those of a philosophical nature, and marshalling those materials to support a coherent argument. The department may consider how to address those skills in lower-level classes so that students are better prepared for upper-level classes.

The assessment process
This assessment cycle, together with feedback on last year's cycle from the Assessment office, highlights areas where our department assessment process could be improved. In particular, it would be useful to improve the rubrics that we have been using and to simplify our assessment goals.

The department has been using rubrics to collect information about student learning for the past two years. It seems likely that instructors apply varying standards for what constitutes "meeting" or "exceeding" expectations. A more detailed rubric, with descriptions of what constitutes "meeting" and "exceeding" objectives, might improve the inter-instructor comparability of responses. After a department-wide discussion about what we believe students should be able to accomplish, we should begin producing rubrics with that information included, starting with the outcome(s) we measure in the coming academic year.

It is clear from the past few assessment cycles that the department collects a large amount of data of imperfect quality and is not always effective in using that data to improve instruction. It also appears that, going forward, the demands for data collection will increase: we will need to provide more detailed information about the artifacts and the assignment prompts that produced them. Collecting all that information for the 15 courses we included this year would be a burden for all. As a result, it will behoove the department to simplify the assessment plan so that it includes fewer but more measurable outcomes, more detailed rubrics, and fewer courses in which data are collected each year. We should also reduce the number of 1000 and 2000 classes included in the assessment process, since the accomplishments of students in these classes are not good measures of the effectiveness of the major. As a part of rethinking the assessment plan, we can engage in a curricular planning process in which we more directly map outcomes to classes, as recommended by one of the instructors this year. The goal will be an assessment plan that reduces the burden on instructors while, hopefully, providing more accurate and more actionable results.

6. **Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of <u>Current</u> Assessment Findings**
   A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

   In August 2022 at our annual faculty retreat, the full faculty received information about the 2022 Assessment, and we discussed these results.

   B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

   Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies
   - Course content
   - Teaching techniques
   - Improvements in technology
   - Prerequisites
   - Course sequence
   - New courses
   - Deletion of courses
   - Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

   Changes to the Assessment Plan
   - Student learning outcomes
   - Artifacts of student learning
   - Evaluation process
   - Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
   - Data collection methods
   - Frequency of data collection

   Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

   There are two levels of responses here – actions taken in individual courses and actions taken by the department as a whole.

   Regarding outcome 1, instructors reported some changes they plan to make in their classes:
   - More activities aimed at beginning students who are struggling with basic concepts, including handouts and worksheets
   - Reallocate time away from topics where students were well-prepared, in particular basic knowledge of US government structures in a foreign policy class
   - Break students into groups to reflect on particular questions and share their conclusions
   - More guest speakers

- Replace some more advanced topics with a simulation activity

Regarding outcome 4, instructors reported some changes they plan to make in their classes:
- Use of videos about how to talk with each other on controversial issues
- Develop a specific activity that delves more fully into the various components of the rubric
- More explicit instruction regarding the nature of legal argumentation and the differences between factual evidence, arguments, and analysis
- Many instructors felt no changes were necessary since student mastery of this learning outcome was high.

One instructor volunteered to guest lecture on courts in other introductory classes if that would help students better understand that branch of government.

At our retreat, we had two main topics of discussion regarding assessment. First, in addressing Outcome #1, we discussed how to ensure our introductory classes convey, common information about institutions we want our students to know for our more advanced classes. For some background, in political science there are subfields, such as American Politics and International Relations. Responding to our assessment feedback, American politics professors have already discussed how to change the content in POLS 1150: American Political Systems, our required American politics class for majors. Specifically, Dr. Hazelton identified that it would be helpful for her later judicial politics classes if students better understood the differences between district courts and courts of appeals. The International Relations and Comparative Politics subfields have agreed to meet to have similar conversations about the content in "Introduction to International Relations.."

At our August retreat, we also began to work on creating more detailed rubrics to help faculty distinguish and have a common understanding of what it meant for a student to not meet expectations, meet but not exceed expectations, and exceed expectations. We also plan to hold a separate meeting in September or October of 2022 with faculty who are assessing students to ensure these faculty understand expectations.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

7. **Closing the Loop: Review of <u>Previous</u> Assessment Findings and Changes**
   A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

   We started to employ rubrics to collect information about student learning.

   B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

   We have employed rubrics for two assessment cycles.

   C. What were the findings of the assessment?

   On the one hand, the use of rubrics provided more nuanced information and got many instructors past the point of simply reporting that everything is fine. On the other hand, use of the rubrics is not universal, and it appears that instructors apply different standards for determining whether students meet or exceed expectations.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

As detailed above, we plan to produce more detailed rubrics with clearer standards for each gradation of learning.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools (e.g., artifact prompts, rubrics) with this report as separate attachments or copied and pasted into this Word document. Please do not just refer to the assessment plan; the report should serve as a stand-alone document.

Political Science BA assessment

Outcome 1: Students will be able to identify the structure and operation of political systems in the U.S, across a variety of countries, and in multinational organizations.

>   Please fill in at least one rubric for each student in your class. You may use one or multiple assignments. Expectations should reflect the level of the course.
>
>   For purposes of departmental assessment, you will be asked to report the number of students who <u>do not meet</u>, <u>meet</u>, or <u>exceed expectations</u> for each of the qualities listed below. You will also be asked to compare POLS BA students to other students in the class. You can report other comments as well.

Student is able to:	Does not meet expectations	Meets (but does not exceed) expectations	Exceeds expectations	Outcome does not apply to this course
US				
Describe how political institutions operate to produce laws and policies				
Explain the function of key institutions				
Identify how policy outcomes are affected by institutional structures				
Comparative				
Describe how political institutions operate to produce laws and policies				
Explain the function of key institutions				
Identify how policy outcomes are affected by institutional structures				
Distinguish between authoritarian and democratic institutions and their underlying values				
Multinational organizations				
Describe how international institutions operate				
Explain the function of key international institutions				
Identify how outcomes are affected by institutional structures				

Comments, in particular anything related to this outcome that students can or cannot do well that is not covered by the rubric:

Political Science BA assessment

Outcome 4: Students will be able to identify and gather information from credible primary and secondary sources. Assessed in 3000- and 4000- level courses

> Please fill in at least one rubric for each student in your class. You may use one or multiple assignments. Expectations should reflect the level of the course.
>
> For purposes of departmental assessment, you will be asked to report the number of students who <u>do not meet</u>, <u>meet</u>, or <u>exceed expectations</u> for each of the qualities listed below. You will also be asked to compare POLS BA students to other students in the class. You can report other comments as well.

Student is able to:	Does not meet expectations	Meets (but does not exceed) expectations	Exceeds expectations	Outcome does not apply to this course
Identify needed information				
Distinguish between factual evidence, arguments, and analysis				
Identify how the context within which primary sources were created affects the source				
Assess the purpose of the source's creator and its impact on the credibility of the source				
Distinguish scholarly from non-scholarly sources				
Judge whether a source is considered credible in an academic or policy context				
Cite sources properly				

Comments, in particular anything related to this outcome that students can or cannot do well that is not covered by the rubric: