

Political Science Department 2008-2009 Assessment Report

Goal II of our Program Goals is for "students to acquire a knowledge of the discipline of political science and an ability to think critically and analytically in their perceptions of the political world". The Learning Objective for this goal is for students to "demonstrate their general knowledge of political science, have an acquaintance with the methods of political inquiry, and have the ability to employ certain concepts in analyzing and thinking about politics at all levels of government."

Our desired Learner Outcome to assess this goal and objective is for all Political Science majors to take the Senior Seminar course and research, write and defend their paper in class before faculty and students.

- For the fall 2008 semester, we had 21 students enrolled in the Senior Seminar (POLS 600). Nineteen of these students completed the course work and seminar paper. Nineteen presented their research to the faculty and their peers and received passing grades. (These papers are on file in the department.)
- All of the seniors who graduated in the Spring 2009 completed the Senior Seminar and received passing grades in the course.

In addition, eleven of fourteen graduating seniors completed a Senior Survey and Exit Interview with the Department Chair. Some of the answers are summarized below:

Speaking specifically of your classes as a WSU political science major: how have they prepared you for your immediate future? For later in life?

- I believe the courses at WSU have allowed me to become more knowledgeable, but more importantly the courses have allowed me to become more of a critical thinker in the sense that I'm more educated and better prepared to take on a situation from all angles.
- They have given me a solid knowledge base for grad school in the future.
- I think that my major has helped me to develop and sharpen my critical and analytical thinking skills, which I think will be invaluable anywhere. I have also learned great research and writing skills during my years here, which I know will be most useful when I go onto law school. It was through the variety of classes which I was exposed to that I figured out where my part in Political Science may lay.
- My classes have prepared by teaching me how to write and express my thoughts on paper as well as learning about other points of view and being able to discuss difficult topics.

What do you consider the strengths of the WSU Political Science Department?

- The most important strength of the WSU Political Science Department is its versatility. If you take advantage of every opportunity that the department has to offer you will leave WSU an extremely well rounded individual. If I could recommend one course to take at WSU I would recommend Model United Nations. This course, as I mentioned before, improved many vital skills needed in the professional world.
- Teachers with specific subfields of expertise.
- The department provides basic knowledge of politics, and provides a basis for social connections with a common interest, which is vital in the world of politics.
- The D.C. internship is one of its greatest strengths. My future plans would not be the same without it. Professor Kahn, Professor Shaw, and Professor Hall all take great interest in the students' success. Professor Ciboski's comparative politics class was great. It was easily one of the top three most demanding classes that I've ever taken. I loved it. International Political Economy was one of my favorite classes as well, along with International Relations 220.

Goal III of our Program Goals is for students to "possess a knowledge and an awareness of the workings of the political world in applied political settings". The Learning Objective for this goal is for students to "participate in activities that will provide the opportunity to learn about the world of practical politics".

Our desired Learner Outcome to assess this goal and objective is for students to attend public symposia and lectures on politics and to participate in some of the following opportunities: Model UN, election workshop, internship program, practical politics course, and cooperative education.

We had twenty students participate in Model UN and attend two conferences (St. Louis and New York) where they won eight different outstanding delegate/delegation awards. Five students served as interns in Washington DC and one in Topeka. Eight students were inducted into Pi Sigma Alpha, the political science honors society. Some of the events students could attend included two department Career Day panels. Students also engaged in events sponsored by the Political Science Club, the Young Democratic Socialists, the College Republicans, and the College Democrats.

Senior Survey responses to the following question included:

What experiences have you undergone as a WSU political science major that you believe will affect your prospects for success in your initial activities after graduating and in those activities which you expect to engage beyond that point.

- The Washington DC internship program was a great help in teaching me about the world of politics and how things work in our political system. Because I participated in this program, I feel I learned everything I need to form a career in politics. The College Republicans Club also helped hook me in to the Sedgwick County political scene and connect with candidates and party people.
- As a major in Political Science, I feel that I have undergone a very rigorous curriculum with a focus on critical thinking. I have honed my writing, listening, and communication skills through various classes, and I imagine that I have written close to 200 pages worth of papers and essays. If I am lucky enough to be accepted to Law School, I think that these skills and experiences will definitely help.
- I have learned how to express my point of view in speaking and writing. Further, I have learned to work with other people that I may not get along with on a personal level, but need to work with them to achieve a common goal.
- Learning to research history and apply theory will help me in the future. As well as a firm grasp of political ideologies and how different governments go about governing.

In addition to our annual senior surveys, the department completed a survey of alumni who have graduated from the department in the past five years. In the survey, alumni were asked a series of questions regarding how well their political science degree prepared them for their graduate and professional careers by providing necessary knowledge and skills. Over 70% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their political science major has helped them develop a greater understanding of American politics, comparative politics, international politics, and public policy. Sixty percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were well prepared for law school or graduate school. Seventy percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were equipped to express themselves coherently and articulately, and sixty percent believed that they were prepared to write clearly and lucidly. The one clear identifiable weakness was in helping students collect and understand quantitative data, and conduct research, with only about forty percent *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* that the political science degree helped them in this area.

This survey data reaffirms what the department faculty have already recognized and are taking steps to address. We now require all majors to take a methods class (Political Inquiry), and the Senior Seminar. Our future graduates should be better prepared in the area of quantitative research and analysis.

The Department will continue to require Political Science majors to complete the Senior Seminar with a senior paper. It will also continue to conduct surveys and exit interviews with graduating seniors in order to identify department strengths and areas for improvement.

Submitted by Carolyn Shaw, Department Chair, August 28, 2009.