



## STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

**PROGRAM:** A&S / POL

**SUBMITTED BY:** Chad Rector

**DATE:** Sept. 30, 2016; revised February 6, 2017

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Program description from the Course Catalog:** Please copy and paste the current year's catalog description of this program. This is generally a one-two paragraph description immediately following the name of the program. Please be sure to include the listing of program outcomes as printed.

Resources for the study of politics in the Washington area are extraordinary, and students have the opportunity to participate frequently in many history-making events that occur in this capital city. The program presents a structured curriculum of courses in political theory, international relations, and the politics and governmental institutions of the United States and foreign countries. Students majoring in politics are encouraged to consider a minor in communication, economics, English, history, information technology, or philosophy. Seniors are required to complete an internship in a government agency, congressional office, corporate government affairs department, or other site approved by the academic internship mentor for politics. Seniors must also complete the senior seminar and a comprehensive examination.

Upon successful completion of the politics program, students will be able to

- students will synthesize, analyze, and critically evaluate major arguments in the discipline;
- students will demonstrate an understanding of fundamental political processes, institutions, actors, behavior, and ideas; and
- students will demonstrate an understanding of major theories, methods, and concepts in political science.

**List all of the program's learning outcomes:** *(regardless of whether or not they are being assessed this year)*

Below are the brief descriptions of each learning outcome. The full description of each is in the appendix.

Learning Outcome	Year of Last Assessment	Assessed This Year	Year of Next Planned Assessment
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<i>Concepts</i> Explain the internal logic of basic political science concepts such as power, institutions, political systems, the state, conflict, and citizenship	-	y	
<i>Research</i> Acquire factual knowledge about the world by finding and interpreting information from appropriate sources	-	y	
<i>Analysis</i> Interpret information about the world by using it to evaluate abstract concepts	-		2016
<i>Empathy</i> Explain the connection between motivations and actions, including for political actors or organizations with different values	-		2016
<i>Application</i> Use analytic concepts and models to understand novel situations	-		2017
<i>Writing</i> Express written analysis and conclusions in a clear, coherent way.	-		2017
<i>Review</i> Find and interpret the structure, arguments, and conclusions of scholarly studies in social science	-		2018
<i>Knowledge</i> Demonstrate a command of basic facts about the workings of political institutions in the United States and around the world	-		2018

**Describe how the program's outcomes support Marymount's mission, strategic plan, and relevant school plan:**



Marymount's mission and strategic plan emphasize the need to encourage our students to achieve academic excellence and intellectual growth through the liberal arts tradition. The Politics program promotes these through the elevation of critical thinking and analytical writing. The program's courses offer breadth and depth to each student's intellectual pursuit. The University emphasizes the importance of service, intellectual curiosity, and global perspective; the Politics program encourages service through civic engagement, curiosity through our inquiry and thesis requirements, and global perspective through our courses on global issues and specific regions outside the United States.

**Provide a brief description of the assessment process used including strengths, challenges and planned improvements and provide evidence of the existence of a culture of continuous improvement based on assessment:**

Our assessment process has been entirely overhauled this year, in response to suggestions from the Assessment Committee. The assessment process now focuses on student performance in the senior thesis, as well as student responses to a program survey of graduating seniors. The strength of the assessment process in politics is its focus on "inquiry research," which demands critical thinking, research and writing skills, and knowledge integral to the formal study of politics.

We developed 8 learning outcomes and assessed two of them this year - *concepts* and *research*. In general we found that students have been performing proficiently in each, although a minority of the students are not meeting our standards. The program is doing a full program review, with an external reviewer, this year. We will present a comprehensive set of proposals for a curriculum change, if appropriate, following the completion of the program review; the findings of this assessment report will also inform that set of proposals.

**Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:**

Outcome	Planned Improvement	Update <i>(Indicate when, where, and how planned improvement was completed. If planned improvement was not completed, please provide explanation.)</i>
Students will demonstrate evidence of satisfactory oral and written communication skills as well as competency in critical analysis and/or problem solving through the completion of a politics internship.	We will continue to work closely with our students on program improvements. Specifically, we will have students meet with the Academic Internship Mentor a year before their senior year in order to review the requirements for the internship and	We have expanded the discussion of the internship requirement in POL 250 and in selected 300-level courses that have lots of politics majors, and through advising have encourage students to meet with the

	address issues regarding internship placement and expectations.	Internship Mentor early, before their senior year.
Students will demonstrate an understanding of principles in politics through a four hour comprehensive exam taken during the last semester before graduation.	We are very encouraged by the outcome because the results show us that students are retaining the material even years after taking the course. We plan to further integrate the comprehensive exam into future assessment reports and use it as part of our program review next year.	After further consideration, we decided against using the comprehensive exam in assessment for several reasons. First, the number of transfer students in the program means that the exam was often assessing what they learned before coming to MU (and the content we were testing came from courses they had not taken at MU). Second, we weren't convinced the exam was an accurate reflection of what students were learning because for students as individuals there was nothing at stake in the exam (it was a requirement that they take the exam but not that they achieve any particular score). Third, we had better assessment metrics at our disposal anyway with the senior theses and the graduation survey.
Students will demonstrate satisfactory skills in the development of a research question, and/or thesis, gathering appropriate evidence from primary and/ or secondary sources, analysis of that evidence in a well written and well organized research paper that affirms or refutes the research question and thesis through a senior thesis research project.	Senior Seminar is a great capstone for our majors. However, the timing of the course often coincides with internships, other upper division courses, and comprehensive exams. In our advising sessions, we are guiding our students to take a lighter load of courses during the last semester of their senior year.	We implemented a comprehensive set of guidelines for advising whereby we encourage students to plan around the unique demands of the thesis requirement. This took two forms. First, when having students select courses we encourage them to complete other required courses that have a high workload or that our students have found challenging in the past (such as WI courses, math courses, and internships) either before or after the semester they do senior seminar. Second, in other 200 and

		300 level courses that students take before senior seminar we now encourage them to develop their own portfolio of research papers and notes that they can then draw on when they take senior seminar later.
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**Provide a response to last year's University Assessment Committee review of the program's learning assessment report:**

In response to last year's Assessment Committee Review, we have entirely overhauled our assessment process and learning outcomes, in close coordination with Ann Boudinot who reviewed multiple drafts before approving the final assessment plan.

**Outcomes and Past Assessment**

In consultation with Ann Boudinot we have entirely revised our learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are different than the ones we have used in past years, so we do not have past years with these specific learning outcomes to use as a basis for comparison. As part of our new assessment process we are keeping all senior theses and conducting an annual survey of all graduating seniors that asks them about all 8 learning outcomes, so that in the future we will be able to track changes from year to year.

**Learning Outcome 1: Concepts - explain the internal logic of basic political science concepts such as power, institutions, political systems, the state, conflict, and citizenship.**

**Is this outcome being reexamined?** ☐ Yes ☒ No

*If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.*

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
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<p>Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they derive and discuss a hypothesis or conceptual framework that is grounded in political science theory.</p>	<p>The rubric (see enclosed, under assessment plan) divided concepts into 4 categories and assesses each on a 4-point scale (novice, developing, proficient, and accomplished). We define an acceptable paper as one that averages at least a 3 (proficient) on that scale and our target as a program is for at least 80% of students to meet that "proficient" target.</p>	<p>We reviewed the 9 senior theses from POL 420 plus the 1 honors thesis in politics; 10 student theses in total. These represent all graduating seniors in politics.</p>	<p>The rubric is enclosed as Appendix B in the assessment plan. Of the 10 students, the breakdown in scores was: <u>(Score) number of students:</u> (16) 2 (15) 1 (14) 2 (13) 2 (12) 1 (11) 0 (10) 1 (09) 1</p> <p>80% of the students (all but 2) were in the "proficient" range.</p>
<p>Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>The survey asks students to rank on a 1-5 scale (1=poor, 5=excellent) how well the department teaches concepts. Our target as a program is for an average score of at least 4.</p>	<p>All seniors graduating in politics were given a survey in late summer, asking them to rate the department on all 8 learning outcomes. In summer 2016, 6 out of 10 students responded to the survey.</p>	<p>The specific question was: "One of the goals of the politics program is to help students understand basic concepts in politics, so that students have an understanding of concepts like "rights," "democracy," "representation," "justice," "citizenship," "institutions," and so on. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to understand those basic concepts?" Students were presented with a 1 to 5 scale. Of the 6 students who responded to the survey, 3 of them chose "5" and 3 chose "4," for an average score of 4.5, exceeding our target.</p>

### Interpretation of Results



**Extent this learning outcome has been achieved by students** *(Use both direct and indirect measure results):*

We conclude that this learning outcome has, in general, been achieved by most of our students, while acknowledging that 2 of the students did not hit our “proficient” target.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement** relative to assessment of outcome:

One potential avenue for improvement would be to ensure that students who are struggling with basic concepts have an opportunity to review those prior to attempting to complete their senior thesis.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements** for this year based on assessment of outcome:

The program is doing a full program review, with an external reviewer, this year. We will present a comprehensive set of proposals for a curriculum change, if appropriate, following the completion of the program review; the findings of this assessment report will also inform that set of proposals.

**Learning Outcome 2: Research - acquire factual knowledge using appropriate sources.**

**Is this outcome being reexamined?** ☐ Yes ☒ No

*If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.*

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they present facts and information as a test of their hypothesis or	The rubric (see enclosed, under assessment plan) divided concepts into 4 categories and assesses each on a 4-point scale	We reviewed the 9 senior theses from POL 420 plus the 1 honors thesis in politics; 10 student theses in total. These represent	The rubric is enclosed as Appendix B in the assessment plan. Of the 10 students, the breakdown in scores was: <u>(Score) number of students:</u> (16) 2

explanation of their framework.	(novice, developing, proficient, and accomplished). We define an acceptable paper as one that averages at least a 3 (proficient) on that scale and our target as a program is for at least 80% of students to meet that “proficient” target.	all graduating seniors in politics.	<p>(15) 3 (14) 1 (13) 2 (12) 1 (11) 1</p> <p>90% of the students (all but 1) were in the “proficient” range.</p>
Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.	The survey asks students to rank on a 1-5 scale (1=poor, 5=excellent) how well the department teaches research. Our target as a program is for an average score of at least 4.	All seniors graduating in politics were given a survey in late summer, asking them to rate the department on all 8 learning outcomes. In summer 2016, 6 out of 10 students responded to the survey.	The specific question was: “One of the goals of the politics program is to help students learn how to acquire factual knowledge about the world by finding and interpreting information from appropriate sources. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to find out facts about the world?” Students were presented with a 1 to 5 scale. Of the 6 students who responded to the survey, 4 of them chose “5” and 2 chose “4,” for an average score of 4.67, exceeding our target.

### Interpretation of Results

**Extent this learning outcome has been achieved by students** *(Use both direct and indirect measure results):*

We conclude that this outcome has been achieved.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement** relative to assessment of outcome:





As always, there is room to catch individual students who may be struggling, and to help proficient students reach higher levels. Most politics students take multiple courses that involve substantial independent research, but some fall through the cracks.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**

The program is doing a full program review, with an external reviewer, this year. We will present a comprehensive set of proposals for a curriculum change, if appropriate, following the completion of the program review; the findings of this assessment report will also inform that set of proposals.

**Following pages: Assessment plan**



**Marymount University**  
**Politics Program**  
**Undergraduate Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan**  
**Contact Person: Chad Rector**

This memo summarizes our assessment plan for the next four years, beginning with our assessment of students in the 2015-16 school year (AY 2015) and continuing through the 2018-19 year (AY 2018).

**Summary**

The Politics program will assess two different learning outcomes each year, eight total over the next four years. Each year, these outcomes will be assessed through an independent examination of the senior theses all politics majors produce and through a survey administered to graduating seniors. The eight learning outcomes are each specific to the academic study of politics, and are explained in detail in the next section. Students should demonstrate these understandings and abilities:

1. *Concepts* - explain the internal logic of basic political science concepts such as power, institutions, political systems, the state, conflict, and citizenship. (AY 2015.)
2. *Research* - acquire factual knowledge using appropriate sources. (AY 2015.)
3. *Analysis* - interpret information as a way to evaluate abstract or conceptual ideas. (AY 2016.)
4. *Empathy* - understand the motivations and beliefs of political actors from their own perspectives. (AY 2016.)
5. *Application* - use conceptual ideas to evaluate novel situations. (AY 2017.)
6. *Writing* - express analysis and conclusions in clear writing. (AY 2017.)
7. *Review* - understand the structure and conclusions of scholarly articles in political science. (AY 2018.)
8. *Knowledge* - understand, correctly, the basic working of political institutions in the United States and around the world. (AY 2018.)

These eight independent learning outcomes are summarized in a table in Appendix A.

**Assessment Process**

Each year in May and June, the politics program will assess two learning outcomes using two sources.

1. Senior thesis. As a capstone project, all politics majors are required to enroll in POL 420 and complete a thesis. In writing a thesis, students typically build on work they have completed over multiple courses. The thesis project is therefore both an assessable, standalone project that students are significantly invested in and also a project that reflects work done in more than one course. The thesis is completed in a seminar class. Each year, after the thesis projects have been completed, two faculty



members (the POL 420 instructor and one other) will assess the theses using the rubrics for the two learning outcomes for that year; the rubrics for the first two learning outcomes (for AY 2015-16) are enclosed as Appendix B.

2. Exit survey. The program will contact all graduating seniors and ask them to complete a short survey. Part of the survey is not related to assessment (we ask for contact information, data about jobs, and willingness to be available to chat with prospective students or visit future politics courses meetings on campus). Each year, the survey will also ask one question about each of the eight learning outcomes; these questions are enclosed as Appendix C.

## Appendix A. Learning outcomes.

Student Learning Outcome	Assessment Measures	Assessment Schedule
<p><i>Concepts</i> Explain the internal logic of basic political science concepts such as power, institutions, political systems, the state, conflict, and citizenship</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they derive and discuss a hypothesis or conceptual framework that is grounded in political science theory.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2015-16 Report in Fall 2016</p>
<p><i>Research</i> Acquire factual knowledge about the world by finding and interpreting information from appropriate sources</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they present facts and information as a test of their hypothesis or explanation of their framework.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2015-16 Report in Fall 2016</p>
<p><i>Analysis</i> Interpret information about the world by using it to evaluate abstract concepts</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they critically evaluate hypotheses or analytic concepts.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2016-17 Report in Fall 2017</p>
<p><i>Empathy</i> Explain the connection between motivations and actions, including for political actors or organizations with different values</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which explain the motivations of political actors and groups in light of the goals and values those actors or groups hold.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2016-17 Report in Fall 2017</p>

<p><i>Application</i> Use analytic concepts and models to understand novel situations</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they use a hypothesis or conceptual framework to explain or forecast novel situations.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2017-18 Report in Fall 2018</p>
<p><i>Writing</i> Express written analysis and conclusions in a clear, coherent way.</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they write in a way that is clear, succinct, fluid, and grammatically-correct.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2017-18 Report in Fall 2018</p>
<p><i>Review</i> Find and interpret the structure, arguments, and conclusions of scholarly studies in social science</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis in which they describe and evaluate published academic scholarship in political science.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2018-19 Report in Fall 2019</p>
<p><i>Knowledge</i> Demonstrate a command of basic facts about the workings of political institutions in the United States and around the world</p>	<p>Measure 1, Thesis: Students complete a thesis that includes accurate descriptions of political institutions, rules, movements, or processes.</p> <p>Measure 2, Survey: Students assess the program through a question on the departmental exit survey.</p>	<p>AY 2018-19 Report in Fall 2019</p>

**Appendix B. Thesis rubrics.**  
**Learning outcome - Concepts**

Rubric for assessing understanding of political science concepts using a thesis. Each thesis will be evaluated on a scale ranging from 4 to 16, based on 4 categories each scored 1, 2, 3, or 4.

	Accomplished (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Novice (1)
Goals and actions	Student consistently distinguishes between the preferences the actors hold and the strategies they employ to achieve them	Student shows recognition of conceptual difference but in practice sometimes fails to distinguish	Student shows limited recognition of conceptual difference and often fails to distinguish in practice	Student consistently conflates goals and actions; assumes that actions always reflect disposition
Institutions	Student accounts for role of institutions in shaping options open to actors	Student sometimes accounts for effects of institutions	Student rarely account for effects of institutions	Student does not account for effects of institutions
Theory informed	Thesis is informed by at least one theoretical model of politics, correctly explained	These attempts to explain an existing theoretical model, but usage is not always appropriate or correctly explained	Thesis is not systemically informed by theory, but contains some elements	Thesis is not informed by theory
Conceptual framework	Thesis has a clear conceptual framework, explained in general terms	Thesis has a conceptual framework but is unclear in places	Thesis has a conceptual framework that is inconsistent or contradictory	Thesis does not have a conceptual framework



## **Appendix B, continued. Thesis rubrics.**

### **Learning outcome - Research**

Rubric for assessing the ability to acquire factual knowledge about the world by finding and interpreting information from appropriate sources. Each thesis will be evaluated on a scale ranging from 4 to 16, based on 4 categories each scored 1, 2, 3, or 4.

	Accomplished (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Novice (1)
Use sources for factual material when appropriate	Student consistently uses sources to back up factual claims	Student often uses sources to back up factual claims	Student rarely uses sources to back up factual claims	Student does not use sources to back up factual claims
Use appropriate sources	Student consistently uses sources that are appropriate and authoritative	Student often uses sources that are appropriate and authoritative but also uses some that are dubious	Student rarely uses sources that are appropriate and authoritative and uses many of dubious quality	Student consistently uses dubious sources or does not use sources
Evaluate evidence	Student compares evidence from different sources and makes sound judgments about measurement and reliability as appropriate	Student engages in some comparison and judgment about reliability	Student engages in limited comparison and judgment about reliability	Student does not compare evidence or discuss issues of measurement or reliability
Reference sources appropriately	Student consistently references sources using complete citations	Student often but not always references sources using complete citations	Student rarely references sources using complete citations	Student does not reference sources using complete citations



## **Appendix C. Survey Questions**

Plan for assessing understanding of political science concepts using student self-assessment on a departmental exit survey administered to recently-graduated seniors. Each learning outcome is assessed with a question on the survey, in which students are asked to rate the success of the program in teaching that particular learning objective on a 1-5 scale.

1. Concepts. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students understand basic concepts in politics, so that students have an understanding of concepts like “rights,” “democracy,” “representation,” “justice,” “citizenship,” “institutions,” and so on. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to understand those basic concepts?  
  
(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent
2. Research. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students learn how to acquire factual knowledge about the world by finding and interpreting information from appropriate sources. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to find out facts about the world?  
  
(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent
3. Analysis. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students learn how to interpret information about the world, by using facts about the world it to evaluate abstract concepts or theories. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to use facts to test theories?  
  
(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent
4. Empathy. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students understand the connection between motivations and actions, including for political actors or organizations with different values then they have. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to understand the political motivations of others?

(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent

5. Application. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students use analytic concepts and models to understand novel situations that they have not previously encountered. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to apply theories to new situations that you have not previously studied?

(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent

6. Writing. One of the goals of the politics program is to teach students to write analysis and conclusions in a clear, coherent way. In general, how well do you think the politics program prepared you to write well?

(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent

7. Review. One of the goals of the politics program is to help students learn how to find scholarly journal articles and interpret the structure, arguments, and conclusions of social science studies. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you to find and read academic social science articles?

(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent

8. Knowledge. One of the goals of the politics program is to teach students basic facts about the workings of political institutions in the United States and around the world. In general, how well do you think the politics program as a whole prepared you with basic knowledge about politics?

(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent