

2018 Political Science Program Review
Lee Miller

3. Current Assessments

- a. Course and program assessment. Discuss the results of your program assessment. Explain any strategies, research, initiatives, curriculum development or other activities intended to improve student learning and promote educational equity in your discipline, either at the course or program level.**

Results of Program Assessment

The political science program assessments have mostly focused to date on course-level SLO assessment. Specific quiz questions or assignments were designated as being associated with a given SLO, and data were collected on the percentage of students who performed satisfactorily on those questions or assignments. In general, this was not a very helpful exercise. It provided a snapshot of student performance on very narrow criteria. The results: “Most students performed satisfactorily, thank you, end of story.” For example, in Spring 2018, 100% of students in PLSC 200, sec. AC correctly answered all of the multiple choice questions designed to assess SLO #1 and SLO #2; for SLO #3, 100% answered correctly 2 of the 3 questions, and 95% answered correctly the third question.

This approach, of course, could leave us open to the critique that perhaps we were missing the forest for the trees. Moreover, if we are really concerned about evidence that students have learned X, Y, and Z, then, at the end of the day, students’ course grades seem to be the best indicator of that.

At the suggestion of the SLO coordinator, we are considering trying a different approach over the next reporting period. We’d like to conduct student surveys in which they self-assess their progress on the various student learning outcomes.

For example, consider PLSC 200 SLO A: “Effectively communicate understanding of the roles played by state actors (such as the 3 branches of government) and non-state actors (such as interest groups, political parties and the news media) on the development and implementation of policy.”

We could design a survey in which we ask students to indicate on a scale of 1-5 how much their understanding of the roles of the president and the bureaucracy have increased as a result of taking the course. We could ask similar questions about Congress, the courts, interest groups, political parties and the news media.

Students have, of course, been communicating their knowledge of this to their instructors all semester long in their quizzes, exams, essays, discussions and other assignments. We already know to what extent they can communicate their

knowledge of this. Those who do so effectively pass the course. But by surveying the students, it adds a new dimension to the assessment. We can find out how much students think they've learned. This is, after all, a political science course, and the goal is not just to teach students a set of facts, but instead to help them develop the tools to become active and informed citizens.

Students all too often tell us that they don't vote because they don't feel they know enough about politics and government. Survey questions of this sort, therefore, can give us a sense of how much confidence students have in their own knowledge, or in other words, how likely they are to become more active participants in the political system. Evidence in support of that would be welcome news for democracy, wouldn't it?

Strategies, research, initiatives, curriculum development etc. to improve student learning

Department faculty have been collaborating with faculty advisors for student cohorts with traditionally low student success rates (football, Mana, Puente) to encourage their students to participate in Learning Center Programs geared toward improving student success (Supplemental Instruction and Peer Tutoring).

In addition, in some classes, program faculty have experimented with substituting a culturally sensitive textbook ("American Politics in Black and White" which analyzes politics through the lens of race relations) for a more traditional textbook.

One program faculty member has been using a political simulation, The Civic Mirror, in some classes, to make the subject more relevant to students by giving them hands-on experience in politics. Additional faculty are expected to receive training in how to incorporate this simulation into their curriculum.

The program is considering utilizing student surveys, per the suggestion of the SLO coordinator, to assess student learning from the students' perspective.

b. General Education / Institutional assessment. Discuss participation in any General Education, Core Competencies, institutional or interdisciplinary assessment activities.

Program faculty participated in a variety of equity-related workshops during flex days. In 2017, for example, they participated in a workshop entitled, "The Elephants in the Room: Facilitating Conversations Around Sensitive Issues" (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, and socio-economic status). In 2018, program faculty participated in a workshop entitled, "What's New with Program Review: Equity, Assessment and Student Success." Program faculty have also received Title IX training and training to address sexual harassment/assault on campus.

In addition, in 2018, program faculty listened to a Flex Day panel discussion entitled, "Semester Kick-off: Reflecting on the Student Experience at CSM." Program faculty have also participated in various workshops and meeting concerning program review.

In addition, program faculty have participated in Division meetings that briefed them on institutional initiatives, such as Year One Promise and CSM Cares.

Program faculty also participated in a series of meetings about the development of an interdisciplinary Global Studies program.

Program faculty also collaborate on bringing elected officials, such as city councilors and state legislators, to speak and answer questions on campus. Program faculty also collaborated with Ethnic Studies faculty in bringing the county sheriff to speak and answer questions at CSM. In addition, program faculty collaborated with faculty from other programs and ASCSM in a program on Dreamers/undocumented students.

Finally, program faculty continually participate in the process of updating program course outlines and the AA-T degree to address general education, core competencies and interdisciplinary concerns in the Committee on Instruction.