Annual Academic Assessment Report Cover Sheet

Assessment reports are due the 1st Wednesday after the Fall Term
Email to: assessment@unlv.edu

Program Information:

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<th>Program Assessed</th>
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<td>Department</td>
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<td>College</td>
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<td>Department Chair</td>
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<td>Date Submitted</td>
<td>12-17-2015</td>
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Please attach a narrative (not to exceed 4 pages, excluding appendices) addressing the following:

- What are the student learning outcomes? Please provide a numbered list.
- Which learning outcomes were assessed?
- How were they assessed? (Programs must use at least one direct assessment of student learning.)
- Undergraduate programs should assess at least one University Undergraduate Learning Outcome (UULO) each year, which may or may not overlap with a program learning outcome.
- Graduate programs should assess at least one outcome related to one of the following graduate level requirements each year:
  - student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.
  - activities requiring originality, critical analysis and expertise.
  - the development of extensive knowledge in the field under study.
- What was learned from the assessment results?
- How did the program respond to what was learned?
Please limit the narrative portion of your report to no more than four pages. You may attach appendices with data, tables, charts, or other materials as needed. Please explain the relevant conclusions from any appendices in your narrative. Please contact the Office of Academic Assessment if you have questions or need assistance.

What are the student learning outcomes? Please provide a numbered list

Upon completion of the Bachelor of Arts program in Political Science, students should be able to:

1. Use critical reasoning skills for problem solving.

2. Write persuasively in order to articulate, support, and defend an argument.

3. Apply the research process in the social sciences so as to differentiate between normative and empirical perspectives, comprehend the difference between deterministic and probabilistic outcomes, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the major analytical approaches used in applied research (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, formal).

4. Consume and understand sophisticated information communicated through scholarly writing and the media.

5. Understand the obligations and expectations of citizenship in a democratic society.

6. Explain how political outcomes are shaped by the interplay between preferences and institutions.

7. Describe and analyze the motivations and constraints that underlie and shape political behavior.

8. Explain how outcomes in the political and social world are affected by the multiple causal factors.

9. Describe how multiculturalism influences politics and political outcomes.

Which learning outcomes were assessed?

When we filed the Assessment Plan for 2015-17, the guidance we received is that departments should assess a limited number of outcomes (as opposed to attempting to assess each outcome). We decided to assess outcomes 1 and 2.
How were they assessed?

As discussed in our Assessment Plan, we employ two assessment measures. First, we use an item from the Internship Supervisor Evaluation Form Questionnaire, which is sent to all supervisors of students enrolled in our internship courses (note: junior or senior standing is a requirement for enrollment in the internship; many students are seniors). Specifically, we collected data from the question entitled “Problem-Solving/Critical Thinking Skills.” Supervisors are asked to rate this item – along with all others on the questionnaire – on a 1-5 scale (1 = unsatisfactory; 2 = needs improvement; 3 = satisfactory; 4 = above average; 5 = outstanding/excellent). We excluded supervisor evaluations for non-majors and focused only on Political Science students.

As noted in our assessment plan, the second assessment measure is an evaluation of a sample of research papers written by seniors enrolled in 400-level courses. The evaluation focuses only on critical reasoning skills and writing a persuasive argument, which are related to learning outcomes 1 and 2. Papers were scored according to the following criteria: 1 = unsatisfactory; 2 = needs improvement; 3 = satisfactory; 4 = good; 5 = excellent.

Undergraduate programs should assess at least one University Undergraduate Learning Outcome (UULO) each year, which may or may not overlap with a program learning outcome.

We assessed the Inquiry and Critical Thinking UULO, which overlaps with undergraduate learning outcome numbers 1-2 in Political Science. We used the same assessment instruments and methods as described in #3, above.

What was learned from the assessment results?

Analysis of Internship Supervisor Evaluation Scores—Problem Solving/Critical Thinking

The internship data suggest that internship providers rate the problem-solving and critical reasoning skills of upper-division Political Science students quite favorably. Excluding the summer term, a total of 23 students (majors and non-majors) enrolled in internship courses (of at least three credits) in the Spring and Fall 2015 semesters. Among these students, a total of 14 students were Political Science majors (of junior or senior standing, which is one of the requirements for enrollment). The mean evaluation scores for “Problem-Solving/Critical Thinking Skills” for Political Science majors was 4.57/5 and 4.83/5 in the Spring and Fall 2015 semesters, respectively. Preliminary, then, the results suggest that our students are exhibiting critical reasoning skills in a way that we would expect for graduate of our program. Perhaps more important, the students are demonstrating these skills with potential employers in professions that typically employ graduates in Political Science.
Analysis of Research Papers for Seniors in Political Science

In addition, we examined a sample of research papers written by seniors in Political Science. The papers were drawn from three classes in the International Relations and Comparative Politics subfields (future reports will draw on papers from different subfields). A total of 18 papers were evaluated for the quality of critical reasoning skills and a student’s ability to write a persuasive argument. The mean score for this sample was 4.35/5. This finding is consistent with the internship results and suggests that, on average, students tend to exhibit skills in the good to excellent range.

Response of the Program

Given that the data for the assessment went through Fall 2015, we have not yet had an opportunity to recommend curricular changes in response to the report. As noted in our Assessment Plant, a copy of the report will be circulated among faculty members. The Course and Curriculum Committee will review the report and share recommendations with the faculty. The faculty will then review the committee’s recommendations, if any, concerning changes in curriculum, course content, pedagogy, or other strategies in order to improve.