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>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
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<td>Department Chair</td>
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<td>1-11-2017</td>
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Contact Person for This Report

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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?**

As noted in the department’s report for CY 2015, we have followed the guidance of assessment staff and focused on providing an in-depth analysis of two outcomes. We focus on outcomes 1 and 2.
How were they assessed?

As noted in the department’s Assessment Plan, we employ two measures for the undergraduate assessment. First, we use an item from the Internship Supervisor Evaluation Form Questionnaire. This questionnaire is sent to internship supervisors of students who enrolled in our internship courses (note: junior or senior standing is one of the prerequisites for enrollment in the internship; many students are seniors). The data are collected from the survey 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 include data only for Political Science students enrolled in the internships (evaluation data for non-majors is excluded). Due to a delay in receiving all surveys for Fall 2016, the analysis in this report relies on data for Spring 2016.

The second assessment measure is an evaluation of a sample of research papers written by seniors enrolled in PSC 499, the Political Science capstone. 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. The first cohort to enroll in the capstone was in Fall 2016, and the number was low (three students). Thus, as noted, appropriate caution should be exercised in interpreting this metric.

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, as this is reasonably aligned 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. In Spring 2016, a total of 14 students (majors and non-majors) enrolled in internship courses (of at least three credits). Of these students, a total of 13 students were Political Science majors. The mean evaluation scores for “Problem-Solving/Critical Thinking Skills” for Political Science majors was 4.61/5, which was slightly higher than the mean for Spring 2015. These results are in line with what faculty had expected for our student’s critical reasoning skills. The narrative comments made by internship supervisors were, on
balance, also very positive, and suggested that students were able to apply their critical reasoning and problem solving skills in a variety of contexts (legal cases, client work, etc.). This suggests that students who graduate from our program will have skills that are valuable in the workforce.

**Analysis of Capstone Papers for Seniors in Political Science**

In addition, we examined capstone papers written by seniors in Political Science. As noted, a total of three students were enrolled in the capstone course (which was conducted as a directed independent study). However, only two students completed the paper. A total of two 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 4.65/5. As with the internship students, the evaluation suggests that graduating seniors are exhibiting the analytical reasoning skills that we would expect for our majors. Nevertheless, given the very small sample, this data should be treated with appropriate caution. We expect this situation to improve as more seniors begin to enroll for the capstone course.

**Response of the Program**

As data for this report included observations from Fall 2016, faculty members have not yet had an opportunity to review the findings. The report will be forwarded to the Course and Curriculum Committee and then share recommendations during a faculty meeting. The faculty will then review the committee’s recommendations, if any, concerning strategies to improve teaching, curriculum, and course content. We anticipate that the availability of additional data form the capstone, in particular, will prove useful for ongoing review.