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**Fall 2005 Semester Assessment Report Form
DUE March 31st, 2006**

Directions: Please complete a form for each of the programs within your department. This form was designed to provide a format for assessment reporting and should not be used to limit the amount of information provided. Each box that is attached to each of the sections is designed to adjust to varying lengths. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Bea Babbitt at x51506 or via email at: bea.babbitt@unlv.edu.

1. Program Information:

Program	Masters of Arts in Political Science
Department	Political Science
College	Liberal Arts
Program Assessment Coordinator	David F. Damore
Semester Data Collected	Fall 2005
Report Submitted by	David F. Damore
Phone/email	895-3217; david.damore@unlv.edu
Date Submitted	March 31, 2006

2. According to the Assessment Plan for this program, what were the planned assessments to be conducted during the 2005-2006 Academic Year? You may want to copy and paste from this program's assessment plan.

Which outcomes for this program were measured?	How did you measure the outcomes?	What results did you expect? If the students performed well what would their performance look like, i.e. percentages, means, or comparisons to a national standard?
7 outcomes out of a total of 12 outcomes evaluated this semester.		
1. Development of critical thinking skills necessary for the evaluation of social science concepts.	Instructor evaluations via narratives of students' performances.	Significant improvement over the term.
2. Development of persuasive writing skills.	Instructor evaluations via narratives of students' performances	Significant improvement over the term.
3. Knowledge of the research process in the social sciences.	Instructor evaluations via narratives of students' performances	Significant improvement over the term.
4. Development of the skills and knowledge	Instructor evaluations via narratives of	Significant improvement over the term.

<p>needed for informed information consumption.</p> <p>7. Development of knowledge of the multiple motivations and constraints underlying political behavior.</p> <p>8. Development of an understanding of the multi-causal nature that characterizes the social world.</p> <p>9. Application of the social science research process.</p>	<p>students' performances</p> <p>Instructor evaluations via narratives of students' performances</p> <p>Instructor evaluations via narratives of students' performances</p>	<p>Significant improvement over the term.</p> <p>Significant improvement over the term.</p> <p>Significant improvement over the term.</p>
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3. Results, conclusions, and discoveries. What are the results of the planned assessments listed above? What conclusions or discoveries were made from these results? Describe below or attach to the form.

<p>Results, conclusions, and discoveries</p> <p>During the fall of 2005, the Department of Political Science offered three graduate seminars: PSC 701 (Research Methods in Political Science); PSC 749 (International Human Rights); and PSC 760 (Seminar in Middle Eastern and North African Politics). Assessment of these courses was conducted by the individual instructors. In what follows are narrative descriptions of the instructors' evaluations of students' ability to fulfill learning outcomes.</p> <p>The main requirement for PSC 701 is the development of a research design project through a series of integrated papers (the course introduces students to empirical research methods used in the social sciences). The first paper requires students to develop an original research question. In the second paper students conduct a literature review and assess the state of prior research relevant to their topic. Paper three requires students to develop an original theoretical argument, which provides the answer to their research questions. In paper four, students develop a research design which would allow hypotheses derived from their theory to be empirically evaluated. The last part of the project requires students to refine and combine their earlier efforts into a final paper (akin to a conference paper sans the data analysis). As such, the purpose of the project is twofold. First, students are required to apply the principles of the research process to a topic of their own choosing. Second, by receiving continual feedback from the instructor, students are expected to refine and improve their thinking so that when they complete the project they have a paper that fulfills the criteria for valid social science research and would lay the ground work for a Master's thesis. As such, the project taps learning outcomes 1-4 and 9.</p>
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On both of these fronts, the performance for the six students who completed the course was largely in line with expectations. Specifically, all students showed improvement over the term and all of the final papers demonstrated basic understanding of the research process. However, in some cases, students struggled with the expectations of writing at the graduate level (e.g., cogently and persuasively). In other cases, students failed to provide thorough reviews of the relevant literature and struggled with the transformation of abstract theoretical concepts into tangible empirical indicators, a central component of the research process in the social sciences. In one case, a student chose to focus more on his opinions and gut feelings and in so doing, allowed subjectivity to cloud what is supposed to be an objective process. In sum, while students performed at expectations, as compared to prior years, none of the projects were of sufficient quality that they could easily be expanded into a thesis.

In PSC 749, students gained an understanding of the history, laws, organizations and controversies surrounding the international human rights paradigm. Students learned about different conceptualizations and measures of human rights. On a more practical level, students learned about the international organizations that concern themselves with human rights as well as the international conventions and charters on human rights. They also learned about some of the challenges associated with pursuing the human rights agenda in the global arena. In the second third of the class, students learned about “second generation” human rights, which are economic rights and social rights. Students examined the types of economic and social policies implemented by different governments around the world. The last third of the class focused on human rights in Africa. The organizations and charters devoted to human rights in Africa were examined. Students learned about the performance of African countries in the area of human rights. Students gained an understanding of the sources of human rights violations in the African context. They also gained an awareness of how “first generation” human rights can come into conflict with “third generation” human rights or cultural rights. As such, the structure of the course allowed learning outcomes 1,2,4,7, and 8 to be assessed.

Students were required to write three papers for the course. In the first paper, nearly all of the students demonstrated that they mastered the generational view of human rights. They also showed they were familiar with the international laws and conventions on human rights. In the second paper, students grappled with the issues surrounding social and economic rights and all students demonstrated their familiarity with at least one situation in which these rights are at issue. Finally, in the third paper, two thirds of the class showed that they could analyze the subtleties of the issues surrounding the potential conflict between cultural rights and first generation human rights in Africa. For example, one student examined how the members of some ethnic groups see the practice of female genital cutting/mutilation as a cultural right, while the members of many governments and international organizations see this practice as a human rights violation. Only one student seemed to have difficulty identifying the pertinent considerations regarding human rights in Africa. Most of the students also demonstrated an ability to apply what they learned in the first third of the class about

human rights law to the issue they addressed in their last paper.

PSC 760 provides students with in-depth analysis of the political institutions, processes, and policies in the Middle East and North Africa. More specifically, being an area study course, the seminar expected the students to have an understanding, or quickly gain an understanding, of the theories and methods in Comparative Politics and International Relations. The requirements for the course are a series of book reviews and a research project where students select a topic and examine the state of the scholarly literature relevant to their topic. The expectations for the papers are that students will be able to write persuasively and cogently and develop a coherent analytical framework. These papers also intended to evaluate not only students' understanding of the Middle East and North Africa but more importantly the theoretical and methodological tools employed in this area of study. The evidence for learning outcomes 1,2,3,7 and 8 the four students who completed PSC 760 is mixed. Indeed, only one student earned a grade higher than a B on the research paper (two other students received B's and one student received a C+). In particular, two major concerns emerge from an inspection of the research papers and book reviews. First, most of the students struggled in organizing and presenting their papers, and second, many of the papers lacked a coherent theoretical framework. Moreover, while the professor did spend a great deal of time covering the methodological tools employed in this area of study, the students' unwillingness to read on these topics was detrimental to their performance on the term papers.

In sum, the evidence collected in fall 2005 indicates mixed support for the expectations. Specifically, as noted above, the major expectation for the learning outcomes assessed was significant improvement during the term. While in all three courses students did demonstrate improvement, as discussed above, these performances were uneven. An unexpected discovery from the assessment of these courses is the overall poor quality of writing demonstrated by the students. Clearly, as indicated by the instructors' narrative evaluations of students' performances, students in the graduate program, particularly entry level students, struggle to write at the graduate level. At the same time, all of the courses offered in the fall required a good deal of writing from students.

4. Use of Results. What program changes are indicated? How will they be implemented? If none, describe why changes were not needed.

At the present time, the Department of Political Science does not plan to make any changes to the program. The reason for this is that the department has already submitted a proposal to significantly overhaul the graduate program. Specifically, the proposal is for a PhD. in political science that would shift the focus of the graduate program from a general political science degree to a specialized degree in global studies. At the present time, the proposal is waiting approval from higher ups. As a consequence, any attention that the department would devote to the MA program is likely to be short lived because when the PhD. comes on line the emphasis of the graduate program will change dramatically (e.g., more rigorous admission standards; a well defined plan of study; and

increased expectations of student performance).

5. Dissemination of results, conclusions, and discoveries. How and with whom were the results shared?

The information was distributed to all full time faculty members in the Department of Political Science, as well as the Dean's Office in the College of Liberal Arts. In addition, the report is posted on the Department of Political Science web page.