**Comments from the Assessment Committee (August, 2009): Political Science**

**Assessment Committee Contact Person: Cheryl Blackwell**

**Plan also reviewed by: Drew Dunham and Dean McCurdy**

General Suggestions (sent to all Departments/Programs)

In general, there were a few themes that the Assessment Committee noticed. First, it is most helpful when the progression from Step 2 to Step 3 and Step 3 to Step 4 are clear. That is, after you have articulated your learning goals, the clearest proposals are explicit in how the courses/experiences in Step 3 directly support the learning goals. And Step 4 should take full advantage of all of the places in Step 3 where data might be collected. Second, make strategic use of both direct and indirect measures, and think about whether data can be collected at the beginning, during the program of study, and at the end. This gives a richer sense of where and when your work contributes strongly to learning goals and where improvements might be made. Third, make your plan manageable! All data need not be collected annually; some can be done every other year. And you may choose not to measure for all of your learning goals right now. Make claims that you can (a) intellectually, ethically stand behind and (b) find resources to measure.

**Specific comments on your plan**

**Step 1 (Program Mission)**

Comments:  Might want to combine and tightened up some sentences...

Example: Our students will develop skills and modes of thinking that foster a deeper understanding of the world, an appreciation of its diversity and a respect for pluralistic points of view that will help them become engaged citizens and productive members of society.

**Step 2 (List goals/outcomes)**

Comments: Your student objectives are very good, but they need to be student-centered.  Also complex objectives may be easier to measure if they broken into components.

Example: Goals/Outcomes #1 Students will recognize the value of questioning the conventional wisdom on an issue and learn how to weigh and assess competing arguments.

Example: Goal/Objectives #5  might be easier to understand (assess) if it was broken down into finer points...perhaps something like,

Students will understand political processes and attitudes

Students will understand political politics, political cultures and historical experiences outside (different) than the US

Students will understand that globalization has influenced (and will continue to change and influence) American politics**....etc.**

**Step 3 (Identify Program Components)**

Comments: Listing out specific course objectives is excellent, but it would also be helpful to clearly map (connect) the departments learning goals/outcomes to specific courses.

Example #3 PLSC 201...It is obvious that Goal/Objectives 2 and 4 (and there may be others) are addressed...so why not show the connection?

Just a thought

**Step 4** (Select methods/data sources and instruments)

1. Senior exit survey. This contains numerically coded responses to derive and analyze summary quantitative indicators of learning objectives. Open-ended qualitative responses are also evaluated. The survey focuses on student attitudes about the Department. Students are asked how satisfied they were with several different aspects of their department experience. Future surveys will include questions to determine, on average, the number of hours they studied, how much they participated in class, how much they read, and how much contact they had with professors.

2. Alumni survey. Like the initial survey, this contains open-ended questions as well as questions that can be coded into discrete responses to make quantitative summary assessments. Alumni will be asked to consider, in retrospect, which courses proved most valuable to them, and to explain why.

3. Collaborative departmental qualitative assessment of the senior ‘capstone’ paper. Members of the Department will meet to discuss common strengths and weaknesses in the paper (e.g., how well do students use evidence to support an argument). The collaborative assessment will provide an immediate ‘snapshot’ of student strengths and weaknesses.

Comments:  You have examples of both direct and indirect assessment---that's good!  The Senior Capstone paper has merits but it has to be time-consuming.  Maybe you could alternate it with other direct measures.  For example, one semester you may decide to assess Goal/Object 2.  Let's say Goal/Outcome 2 is an important outcome in PLSC 201.  You could use the evidence collected from that class to show that your department is meeting this outcome. I don't know how you could do this...by may the students have to submit a ten page paper that requires them to effectively use a variety of sources (5 primary sources, 2 data sets, etc).  The department could also require an annotated bibliography that asked students to explain why they selected each source and what it contributed to their paper...

Also, since all majors must take PLSC 101 and PLSC 105.....it could be an opportunity to do some sort of "pre-testing"

**Next Steps:**

In coordination with your Assessment Committee reviewers and their feedback, please observe the following deadlines for your assessment cycle:

·       September 15: Revisions to Steps 1-4 due (if necessary)

·       October 1: Completion of Steps 5 & 6 using preliminary data

·  November 2: Final Fall 2009 plans due