

Department of Political Science

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Degree Program Assessed	Assessment Method	Number Assessed
Master of Arts	Exit Interview	4
	Comprehensive Exams	10
	Methods Courses	11
	Thesis/Creative Component Defense	4
	Surveys of Students' Committee Chairs	4
	Presentation of Research	0
	Student Evaluations of Courses	0

Outcomes Assessment from previous year:

As the Outcomes Assessment Office was dissatisfied with the Political Science Graduate Program Outcomes Assessment Plan last year, [REDACTED] indicated that we should not submit an assessment for that year. Instead, she asked that the department concentrate on developing a new Outcomes Assessment Plan to measure the department's performance. We complied with her request and spent the summer of 2002 developing an acceptable Outcomes Assessment Plan.

The methods that the department chose to assess the program include student enrollment in research methods courses, student performance in thesis/creative component defense, surveys of student performance on theses/creative components by committee chairs, performance on comprehensive examinations, presentations of research by graduate students at conferences, exit interviews with graduating students, biennial survey of alumni of graduate program, and student evaluations of courses.

Analysis and Findings:

The Graduate Coordinator interviewed graduating M.A. students in May. Additionally, informal discussions were held with graduate students when they visited the Graduate Coordinator to discuss their Plans of Study, select courses, or address other issues associated with their graduate education. The questions were aimed at gaining a better understanding of what the graduate program currently was doing well, what was problematic, and what the department could do to improve students' graduate educational experiences. The students all indicated that they enjoyed the classes that they took and the faculty. Three areas of weakness that were commented upon and that will receive serious attention in the upcoming assessment period are the lack of structure in the Masters program (too few required courses), causing uncertainty among students regarding which classes they should take, classes frequently being cancelled because of low levels of enrollment, and unclear expectations about comprehensive exams on the part of students.

Students did well at completing their theses and creative components on schedule, and all received high marks from their committee chairs on the quality of the work and their performance during the students' defense of their work. Related to this, our students are reported to do well utilizing what they have learned in their research methods courses to construct solid research plans for their theses and creative components.

An area of some weakness in the graduate program this year has been performance on comprehensive exams. Three students of 10 failed one of their comprehensive exams on the first try. Two have since passed; one more will re-take the failed exam this summer.

Exit Interviews: This year we had four students graduating from the M.A. program in the spring. These four students constitute the sample population. The exit interview was designed to assess student perceptions in several areas: their departmental experiences, what classes were the most useful, what they liked most about the program, what they liked least about the program, and what could be done to improve the student's graduate educational experiences.

When asked what classes were most helpful, most students admitted that they found classes in research methods to be very useful. Among students in Public Administration and Public Policy, classes that emphasized practical hands-on experience were favored. Among students in Comparative and International Relations, the Seminar in International Political Economy, and the Graduate Seminar in International Relations were favored.

With regard to aspects of the program that need improvement or were not liked by students, two dominated. One was in regard to course offerings. Students complained that courses were cancelled on too frequent a basis because of low enrollment, and asked that the department do something about this problem. Another issue was regarding comprehensive exams. Some students commented that they were uncertain as to what the professors were expecting from students on the exams, that they were not certain what material they needed to be familiar with, and that the material covered was too broad.

Comprehensive Exams: In the fall 2002, four students each took one comprehensive exam, for a total of four comprehensive exams taken. Of these four exams, two were passed and two were failed. In the spring 2003, four students took a total of six comprehensive exams, with two students taking two exams each, and two students taking one exam each. Of these six exams, five were passed and one was failed. Overall, the program had a 70% rate of passage of comprehensive exams.

The two students who failed a comprehensive exam in the fall 2002 passed the exam when they retook it in the spring 2003. The student who failed a comprehensive exam in the spring 2003 is scheduled to retake the exam in the summer 2003.

Methods Courses: All students in the M.A. program are required to complete two courses in research methods, of which one must be in POLS 5013, Quantitative Methods. The purpose of this requirement is to introduce students to research methodology; so that they will be prepared to develop a research design for their theses and creative components and for future research endeavors. Six students enrolled in and completed POLS 5013; five students enrolled in and completed other research methods courses. Two students completed REMS 5013, Research Design and Methodology, and three students completed SOC 5273, Qualitative Research Methods.

Thesis/Creative Component Defense and Surveys: All four of the graduating M.A. students chose to do a creative component. All four successfully defended their creative components and earned an "A" for their projects. The surveys of the students' committee chairs indicate that all committee chairs were highly satisfied with their experiences working with the students and with the quality of work produced. Committee chairs referred to their students as hard working and self-directed; one committee chair indicated that the student had "worked hard to produce a well-polished, articulate final document."

Presentation of Research: None of the department's M.A. students presented research at professional conferences.

Evaluations of Courses: Due to serious budget constraints the department was not able to do student evaluations of courses and instructors.

Uses of Assessment Results:

The assessment results as well as the department's own learning experiences this past year or so are being used in three principal ways: First, to make reforms in the comprehensive exam policies and procedures, and to clarify department expectations of students on comprehensive examinations; Second, to provide more comprehensive information to incoming graduate students regarding the program's policies and procedures; Third, to make broad reforms in the M.A. program, with the goals being a broader range of graduate course offerings, higher levels of enrollment in graduate courses, a more focused and structured program, and a program that works with the department's existing strengths and resources. Copies of the Assessment Results will be made available to all faculty members at the earliest fall faculty meeting.

1. To address uncertainty and confusion among students and faculty members concerning the policies and procedures applicable to comprehensive examinations, the Graduate Faculty Committee has written two reforms to the Comprehensive Examination Policies and Procedures. The Committee will recommend that the department adopt the reforms, and the department will take action on the proposed reforms at the earliest fall faculty meeting. The Committee also has met to provide its interpretation of certain parts of existing Policies and Procedures to clarify the meaning of the Policies and Procedures for future students.
2. To provide incoming students with more explicit information concerning the Political Science M.A. program, the Graduate Coordinator has written a comprehensive document providing information to incoming graduate students. The document details the requirements of the program, including graduation requirements, expectations of faculty members with regards to comprehensive exams and which courses students should take to be adequately prepared for comprehensive exams, and program policies and procedures.
3. Members of the Graduate Committee have met three times and have communicated by email multiple times to engage in a thorough discussion of the direction of the graduate program. We discussed such issues as: What should our direction be in the M.A. program? What are ways to maximize our strengths, particularly given the size of the department and its resources, and its current weaknesses?

On the basis of these discussions and a November 2002 report to the faculty, the Graduate Committee was directed to develop a reform of the graduate program that was more structured than the existing program and that built upon the existing resources and strengths of the department in International Relations, Comparative Politics, Public Administration, and Public Policy. The Graduate Committee has developed this reform and will present it to the department in early-fall 2003 for full discussion and a vote by the department. If approved, this reformed program will likely be put in place in the fall of 2005.

4. As one of the department's objectives is to prepare students to disseminate research findings to appropriate audiences and none of our M.A. students did so this past year, the department must find ways of encouraging student research presentation. One suggestion offered by a graduating M.A. student was to have a faculty/graduate student research colloquium. This is something that has been tried in the past with minimal success, but should be tried again.