

Department of Political Science
Assessment Guide for 2018-2019 Academic Year
Pre-Major Courses

As part of the program assessment process mandated by the university, the Department of Political Science conducts annual assessments of our pre-major courses (all 1000- and 2000-level and certain 3000-level courses).

This guide is designed to assist you in satisfying the assessment requirements for your course. If you need additional help, please contact the assessment coordinator, Jessica Valsi (.1), or Teresa Johnson (.674) at UCAT to schedule an individual consultation. We have also put together a “**Frequently Asked Questions**” document that addresses frequent areas of confusion and provides suggestions that may be helpful. Further assessment information is also available in Charles Smith’s “**Nuts and Bolts of Teaching**” handout.

Summary: All pre-major courses are assessed to determine whether enrolled students *gain **basic knowledge** across the major subfields and thematic specialization of Political Science.* Our department defines demonstrating ***basic knowledge*** as scoring ***75% or higher*** on the relevant exam questions or assignments you decide to use in your course (more on this below). The *minimum target* for your course is for ***50% of your students*** to score 75% or higher in the measurement of your course objectives, and the *aspirational target* is for ***75% of your students*** to score 75% or higher.

We ask you to complete the following three steps to meet the department’s assessment requirements:

- **Syllabus Construction:** Please include the above referenced basic knowledge goal in your syllabus and describe the *expected learning outcomes* or *objectives* specific to your course that will demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to this goal.
- **In-Class Measurement:** At least some of your assignments, exam questions, or essay prompts should be designed to assess student acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the basic knowledge goal.
- **End-of-Semester Reporting:** At the end of the semester, you will receive an e-mail from Qualtrics asking you to report *the percent of students* who have demonstrated basic knowledge on your chosen assessments. The attached “**Frequently Asked Questions**” document includes some suggestions for how you may want to combine multiple questions, assignments, or exam scores to calculate the percentage (although you are certainly free to use a different method).

The remainder of this document provides some examples of how you might implement each of these steps in your own course.

I. Syllabus Construction.

The first step in assessing your course is to include all relevant *goals* and associated *expected learning outcomes* in your syllabus. Please remember that you are required to send the completed syllabus to Jessica Valsi (.1) at the beginning of each semester.

- a. **Goals.** Goals should address the question: How will students think differently after the course?
 - i. As a pre-major course, your class needs to fulfill the following program goal: *Students will gain **basic knowledge** across the major subfields and thematic specializations of Political Science.*
 - ii. In addition to this program goal, your syllabus may specify other course-specific goals that you have defined and should include any relevant university General Education (GE) goals if your course fulfills GE requirements. If you are not sure whether your class is classified as a GE course, contact the coordinating advisor, Charles Smith (.3280). *Please note, however, that you will not need to submit any data related to these other goals to us as part of the program assessment process.*
- b. **Expected Learning Outcomes.** These are outward demonstrations of the acquisition of skills and knowledge, designed to align with specific goals.
 - i. For each goal, identify the relevant objectives.

“Students will be able to...” is a helpful starting point for formulating your course expected learning outcomes. For example:
“Students will be able to describe basic concepts used to understand X; differentiate among theories of Y; apply concepts to contemporary policy debates.”
 - ii. Expected learning outcomes should be clearly aligned with goals.
 - iii. **Example adapted from PSC 1300:**
 1. Course Goal: Students will gain basic knowledge in an area of specialization.
 2. Expected Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, students will be able to...
 - a. Describe the basic concepts associated with the three major approaches to the study of world politics, Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism.
 - b. Apply concepts from each of the three major approaches to contemporary policy debates.

II. In-Class Measurement

To measure student success in meeting the expected learning outcomes, we recommend using *embedded testing* and/or, *rubric grading* (if you assign longer essay-type questions.) Our department is required to report **one aggregate numerical measure** for each pre-major course, i.e, the percent of students that demonstrate *basic knowledge*. As we note above, the department defines demonstrating basic knowledge as scoring **75% or higher** on quiz or exam questions (if you use *embedded testing*) or on the relevant portions of essay assignments (if you are using *rubric grading*). Please note that we are **not** asking you report the *overall class* grades or *total* exam or assignment scores — only scores on the questions relevant to measuring student fulfillment of the department goal. Your course almost certainly has other goals, and some of the questions or assignments you use may not be related to the department’s basic knowledge goal. Similarly, we are not asking you to report the overall essay grades or point totals, only the portions of the essay grade relevant to measuring student fulfillment of the department goal.

a. Implementing Embedded Testing:

- i. **Identify particular questions** in your quizzes, midterms, and final exams that can be readily linked to the expected learning outcomes you have defined.
- ii. **Record the number of students** that demonstrate basic knowledge by scoring 75% or higher. The attached “**Frequently Asked Questions**” document includes some suggestions for how you may want to combine multiple questions, assignments, or exam scores to calculate the percentage (although you are certainly free to use a different method).
- iii. **Report this percentage** on the Qualtrics survey at the end of the semester.
- iv. **Example adapted from PSC 1300:**
 1. Course Goal: Students gain basic knowledge in an area of specialization.
 2. Expected Learning Outcome: By the end of this course, students will be able to describe the basic concepts associated with the three major approaches to the study of world politics, Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism.
 3. Embedded Testing Measure: On a short-answer exam question, students will correctly define the security dilemma and situate it among the approaches. Graded on a ten-point scale, 7.5 or higher demonstrates basic knowledge.

b. Rubric Grading of Essays

- i. **Compose a rubric to grade your essay and identify specific criteria** on the rubric that align with your expected learning outcomes.
- ii. **Record the number of students** that demonstrate basic knowledge by scoring 75% or higher on these criteria. The attached “**Frequently Asked Questions**” document includes some suggestions for how you may want to combine multiple rubric items to calculate the percentage (although you are certainly free to use a different method).
- iii. **Report this percentage** on the Qualtrics survey at the end of the semester. *Reminder: Rubric assessment does not entail reporting overall assignment scores or grades, only the portion of the overall points aligned with the particular objective being measured.*
- iv. **Example adapted from PSC 1100:**
 1. Course Goal: Students gain basic knowledge in an area of specialization.
 2. Expected Learning Outcome: By the end of this course, students will be able to describe each of the steps in the legislative process and identify major hurdles (or “veto players”) that must be overcome for successful enactment.
 3. Essay Prompt: Compare and contrast the Clinton administration efforts to enact healthcare reform with the successful passage of the Affordable Care Act. Why did the Obama administration succeed where the Clinton administration failed?
 - a. Rubric Grading Criterion: The essay should accurately describe the process through which legislation moves in Congress and identify each step at which a bill can be defeated. On a five-point scale, students should score 3.75 or higher to demonstrate basic knowledge.

III. End-of-Semester Reporting

At the end of the semester, you will receive an e-mail with a link to a short Qualtrics questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask you to report: (1) The course-specific expected learning outcomes that are related to the program’s **basic knowledge** goal; and (2) the percent of student who have demonstrated basic knowledge by scoring 75% or higher. Note that if your assessments included multiple questions, assignments, and/or essay rubric items, you will need to aggregate these discrete point values into a single aggregate score and calculate the fraction of students who score 75% or higher based on this overall score.