**Department of Political Science**
**Assessment Guide for 2018-2019 Academic Year**
**Upper Division Courses**

As part of the program assessment process mandated by the university, the Department of Political Science conducts annual assessments of three upper-division courses from one subfield per semester.

The course you are teaching has been selected for assessment in the 2018-2019 academic year.

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.

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*Summary:* Selected upper-division courses are assessed to determine whether enrolled students (1) *gain* __*in-depth knowledge of the scholarly literature*__ *in a field or thematic specialization;* and (2) *develop* __*analytic and critical thinking skills*__ *that will enable them to evaluate competing arguments and to appraise value-based claims.* Our department has identified a score of __*75% or higher*__ on the relevant exam questions or assignments (more on this below) as necessary to demonstrate that a student has *satisfied* the respective objective (both critical thinking and in-depth knowledge in the subfield). The department has also identified a score of __*85% or higher*__ as demonstrating *mastery* of each objective.

The *minimum target* for your course is for 50% of your students to score 75% or higher in the measurement of each course objective, and the *aspirational target* is for 50% of your students to score 85% 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 in-depth knowledge and critical thinking goals 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 these 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 both the in-depth knowledge and critical thinking goals.

- **End-of-Semester Reporting**: At the end of the semester, you will receive an e-mail from Qualtrics asking you to report (1) the *percent of students* who have *satisfied* each of the goals; and (2) the *percent of students* who have *demonstrated mastery* of each goal. The attached "**Frequently Asked Questions**" document includes some suggestions for how you

may want to combine multiple questions, assignments, or exam scores to calculate these percentages (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 an upper-division course, your class needs to fulfill both of the following program goals:

            1. *Students will gain* **_in-depth knowledge of the scholarly literature_** *in a field or thematic specialization.*

            2. *Students will develop* **_analytic and critical thinking skills_** *that will enable them to evaluate competing arguments and to appraise value-based claims.*

        *ii.* In addition to these program goals, 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 4164:**

            1. <u>Course Goal:</u> Students gain deeper knowledge of the scholarly literature, including debates about theories, research methods, and substantive issues, in one of the areas of specialization.

2. <u>Expected Learning Outcomes</u>: By the end of this course, students will be able to…

    a. Explain the scholarly understanding of key determinants of political participation and partisanship in American politics.

    b. Explain scholarly understanding of the key barriers to political participation in American politics.

## II. In-Class Measurement

To measure student success in satisfying 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 department goal and target (minimum vs. aspirational) in each course. For example, we will need to report the percent of students that demonstrate *in-depth knowledge* as well as the percent of students demonstrating mastery of this goal.

As we mention above, the department defines demonstrating achievement of relevant knowledge objectives 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*) and a score of **85% or higher** as evidence of mastery of those objectives.

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 goals. Your course almost certainly has other goals, and some of the questions or assignments you use may not be related to the department's in-depth knowledge or critical thinking goals. 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 (1) in-depth knowledge and (2) effective critical thinking by scoring 75% or higher on questions or assignments relevant to each goal. Similarly, record the number of students that achieve mastery of each goal by scoring 85% 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 these percentages (although you are certainly free to use a different method).

    iii. **Report these percentages** on the Qualtrics survey at the end of the semester**.**

iv. **Example adapted from PSC 4125:**

    1. <u>Course Goal:</u> Students gain deeper knowledge of the scholarly literature, including debates about theories, research methods, and substantive issues, in one of the areas of specialization.

    2. <u>Expected Learning Outcome</u>: By the end of this course, students will be able to describe the American system of federalism and explain how federalism constrains state-level policymaking.

    3. <u>Embedded Testing Measure</u>: On a short-answer exam question, students will correctly describe the funding sources used by states to pay for Medicaid and explain how interstate competition affects the generosity of welfare benefits (including Medicaid) individual states adopt. Graded on a ten-point scale, 7.5 or higher demonstrates in-depth knowledge and 8.5 or higher demonstrates mastery.

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 (1) in-depth knowledge and (2) effective critical thinking by scoring 75% or higher on the criteria relevant to each goal. Similarly, record the number of students that achieve mastery of each goal by scoring 85% or higher on the relevant rubric criteria. The attached "**Frequently Asked Questions**" document includes some suggestions for how you may want to combine multiple questions, assignments, or exam scores to calculate these percentages (although you are certainly free to use a different method).

    *iii.* **Report these percentages** 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 4127:**

    1. <u>Course Goal:</u> Students gain deeper knowledge of the scholarly literature, including debates about theories, research methods, and substantive issues, in one of the areas of specialization.

    2. <u>Expected Learning Outcome</u>: By the end of this course, students will be able to identify the factors that most strongly predict voting behavior in city elections and describe the resulting incentives these electoral considerations generate for local elected officials.

3. Essay Prompt: Consider Tommy Carcettiss successful mayoral campaign (in HBO's "The Wire") and his actions in office as an example of city politics in action. Compare and contrast Carcetti's experience with the scholarly understanding of city politics provided by the course readings. In particular, consider each of the following: (1) Describe Carcetti's electoral strategy and assess its likely effectiveness in the real world, given our understanding of how local elections work. What made his strategy successful in the Baltimore context? What type of cities would his strategy work best in and where would it be ineffective? (2) Briefly summarize Carcetti's major actions and decisions once in the mayor's office. Drawing on the course readings, identify the important context, constraints, and incentives that lead Carcetti to make the decisions that he does. What do these incentives, constraints, and context tell us more generally about the nature of local politics and government?

   a. Rubric Grading Criterion: The essay should accurately describe the evidence from the empirical literature on the importance of race and ethnicity in predicting vote choice in local elections and explain how local political institutions (e.g., partisan vs. non-partisan elections) moderate the importance of race in predicting voting behavior. On a ten-point scale, students should score 7.5 or higher to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and 8.5 or higher to demonstrate mastery.

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 the program's **in-depth knowledge** and **critical-thinking** goals; (2) the percent of student who successfully achieved each of these goals by scoring 75% or higher; and (3) the percent of students who demonstrated mastery of each goal by scoring 85% 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 separately calculate the share of students who score 75% or higher based on this overall score as well as the fraction who score 85% or higher.