***STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM***

***SUMMARY FORM AY 2016-2018***

Please complete a separate worksheet for each academic program (major, minor) at each level (undergraduate, graduate) in your department. Worksheets are due to CASA this year by **June 15, 2018**. Worksheets should be sent electronically to [kjsanders@eiu.edu](mailto:kjsanders@eiu.edu) and should also be submitted to your college dean. For information about assessment or help with your assessment plans, visit the Assessment webpage at <http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/> or contact Karla Sanders in CASA at 581-6056.

M.A. in Political Science

**Degree and**

**Program Name:**

# Submitted By:

Melinda A. Mueller

**Please use size 10 font or larger.**

**PART ONE**

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| What are the learning objectives? | How, where, and when are they assessed? | What are the expectations? | What are the results? | Committee/ person responsible? How are results shared? |
| 1. The student will demonstrate the ability to think and write critically. | Our Department used three measures for this learning objective:   1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   Faculty teaching PLS 5001/Introduction to Political Research directly assess critical thinking at the early stage of students’ M.A. studies. A five point scale is used, with 5 being exceptional, 4 above average, 3 satisfactory, 2 below average, and 1 failure. Faculty apply this rubric to students’ final literature review presentations  The graduate coordinator collects these data at the end of the semester.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/ Capstone Assessment rubric   Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate critical thinking skills when students defend theses, complete comprehensive exams, or present capstone projects. The rubric specifically addresses this objective, applying a 5 point scale, with 5 being exceptional, 4 above average, 3 satisfactory, 2 below average, and 1 failure.  The Department’s graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year, upon completion of a thesis defense, comprehensive exam, or capstone presentation.   1. Conference presentations and publications   We also use an indirect measure to assess our students’ ability to present research at professional conferences and publish their writing in professional academic outlets, including publications in academic journals, as book chapters, book reviews, or encyclopedia entries.  Throughout the year, the graduate coordinator collects data on all graduate student research presentations and publications. External editors, reviewers, conference organizers and discussants evaluate graduate student research. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   Since students are just beginning their graduate studies in PLS 5001, we expect that the average rating would be at least 3.0, or satisfactory.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students would be at least 4, or above average.   1. Conference Presentations and publications   We expect 20% of our students to present at a conference or have a publication. With average enrollment over the two years at 45 students, this percentage would result in 9 students participating in these research activities.  However, in the past two years, two changes may affect this percentage. First, the state budget crisis in AY 2016-2017 restricted funding opportunities for graduate student research travel. Second, we began offering a fully online MA option in AY 2016-2017, which enrolls about half of our graduate students. These students are more likely to be working professionals, away from campus, and unable to engage in professional research conferences at the same level as students enrolled in our face-to-face MA option. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a lower level of participation. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, the average critical thinking evaluation was 3.95 for 42 students, exceeding expectations by 19%.  This score is lower than 2015-2016, but the N has nearly quadrupled.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, the average critical thinking evaluation was 4.18 for 22 students who completed their thesis, capstone, or comprehensive exam, exceeding expectations by 3.6%.  Capstone students had an average score of 4.22, a nearly 20% increase (on a 5 point scale) over the comprehensive exam students in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle. Thesis students had an average score of 4.78, which is very close to the previous assessment cycle average.  We also considered growth of 22 students—did their critical thinking scores improve from when they took PLS 5001 until they completed their thesis/capstone/exam?   * 4 students had perfect ratings at both stages of assessment * 10 students demonstrated growth, with an average of 15.3% growth on a 5-point scale * 3 students demonstrated no growth or decline, with 2 meeting minimal expectations * 5 students declined in skills, an average of 12.6% on a 5 point scale, with 3 of them meeting minimal expectations.   We ran a correlation between the average critical thinking score at degree completion and the # of online credits, and found no relationship.   1. Conference Presentations and Publications   From 2016-2018, 9 students made 19 presentations, and 3 students had publications, or 26.67% of students enrolled. Despite funding challenges and curriculum changes, students still exceeded the expected 20% participation rate. | The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chairman and the Department’s Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. |
| 2. The student will demonstrate content knowledge in their primary area of study. | Our department used two measures for this objective:   1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   The same rubric used for Learning Objective #1 (see above) asks faculty co-teaching PLS 5001 to evaluate content knowledge from students’ literature review presentations. Two questions on this rubric directly address content knowledge.  The graduate coordinator collects these data at the end of the fall semester.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate content knowledge when students defend their theses, complete comprehensive exams, or present their capstone projects. The same scale is used as described in Learning Objective #1 (see above).  The Department’s graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year as thesis defenses and exams are scheduled. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   Since students are just beginning their graduate studies in PLS 5001, we expect that the average rating for all students would be at least 3.0, or satisfactory.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students during the academic year would be at least 4, which is above average. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, the average content knowledge evaluation was 3.81 for 42 students, exceeding expectations by 16%.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, 22 students defended a thesis, completed a comprehensive exam, or presented a capstone project. The average content knowledge was 4.33, exceeding expectations by 6.6%.  Capstone students had an average score of 4.38, very close to the average for comprehensive exam students in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle. Thesis students had an average score of 4.56, which is very close to the previous assessment cycle average.  When considering individual growth, we found the following:   * 3 students had perfect ratings at both stages of assessment * 15 students demonstrated an average of 20% growth on a 5-point scale * 1 student demonstrated no growth or decline, but met expectations * 3 students demonstrated weaker skills, averaging a decline of 15.5% on a 5-point scale, with all 3 meeting minimal expectations.   We ran a correlation between the average content knowledge score at degree completion and the # of online credits, and found no relationship existed. | The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chairman and the Department’s Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. |
| 3. The student will develop the ability to apply appropriate social science research methods. | We use three measures to evaluate this objective:   1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   The same rubric used for Learning Objective #1 (see above) asks faculty co-teaching PLS 5001 to evaluate student awareness of appropriate research methods from students’ literature review presentations. Two questions on this rubric directly address content knowledge.  The graduate coordinator collects these data at the end of the fall semester.   1. Thesis Defense/Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate research methods skills when students defend their theses, complete their comprehensive exams, or present capstones. The same scale is used as described in Learning Objective #1 (see above).  The Department’s graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year as thesis defenses and exams are scheduled.   1. Conference presentations and publications   Student conference presentations and publications serve as an indirect measure of research methods skills, since all empirical research in Political Science requires an appropriate methodology. Additionally, review essays and related research requires students to be aware of how to evaluate research methodologies. Conference section heads, discussants, and editorial boards evaluate the quality of student work.  Throughout the year, the Graduate Coordinator keeps track of how many students present at research conferences or have scholarly publications. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   Since students are just beginning their graduate studies in PLS 5001, we expect that the average rating for all students would be at least 3.0, or satisfactory.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students during the academic year would be at least 4, which is above average.   1. Conference Presentations and publications   We expect 20% of our students to present at a conference or have a publication. With average enrollment over the two years at 45 students, this percentage would result in 9 students participating in these research activities.  See Objective 1 for our concerns about curricular and budgetary impacts on this expectation. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, the average research methods evaluation was 3.99 for 42 students, exceeding expectations by 20%.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, 22 students defended their theses, completed comprehensive exams, or presented their capstones. The average research methods evaluation was 3.97, a slight decline from the earlier stage of assessment, .4% below the expected average.  Capstone students had an average score of 4.02, a 6% decrease (on a 5 point scale) over the comprehensive exam students in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle. Thesis students had an average score of 4.45, a 6% increase over the previous assessment cycle.  When considering individual growth, we found the following:   * 2 students had perfect ratings at both stages of assessment * 11 students demonstrated growth, an average of averaging 9% on a 5-point scale * 3 students demonstrated no growth or decline, but met expectations * 6 students demonstrated weaker skills, averaging a decline of 18% on a 5-point scale.   We ran a correlation between the average research methods score at degree completion and the # of online credits, and found no relationship existed.   1. Conference Presentations and Publications   From 2016-2018, 9 students made 19 presentations, and 3 students had publications, or 26.67% of students enrolled. Despite funding challenges and curriculum changes, students still exceeded the expected 20% participation rate. | The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chairman and the Department’s Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. |
| 4. Students will develop the ability to orally communicate concepts appropriate for graduate studies in political science. | We use two measures to evaluate this objective:   1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   The same rubric used for Learning Objective #1 (see above) asks faculty teaching PLS 5001 to evaluate student oral communication skills in their literature review presentations. One question on this rubric directly address content knowledge.  The graduate coordinator collects these data at the end of the fall semester.   1. Thesis Defense/Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Presentation Assessment Rubric   Graduate committee members apply a rubric to evaluate oral communication skills when students defend their theses, complete their comprehensive exams, or present their capstone projects. The same scale is used as described in Learning Objective #1 (see above).  The Department’s graduate coordinator collects the data throughout the year as thesis defenses and exams are scheduled. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   Since students are just beginning their graduate studies in PLS 5001, we expect that the average rating for all students would be at least 3.0, or satisfactory.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam Assessment Rubric   Since students are completing their graduate degrees at this level, we expect that the average rating for all students during the academic year would be at least 4, which is above average. | 1. Introduction to Political Research Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, the average oral communication evaluation was 4.20 for 42 students, exceeding expectations by 24%.   1. Thesis Defense/ Comprehensive Exam/Capstone Assessment Rubric   In 2016-2018, 22 students defended their thesis, completed the comprehensive exam, or presented their capstones. The average oral communication evaluation was 4.32, exceeding expectations by 6.6%.  Capstone students had an average score of 4.37, a 12% decrease (on a 5 point scale) over the comprehensive exam students in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle. Thesis students had an average score of 4.89, very close to the average for the previous assessment cycle.  When considering individual growth, we found the following:   * 2 students had perfect ratings at both stages of assessment * 10 students demonstrated growth, averaging 13% on a 5-point scale * 3 students demonstrated no growth or decline, both meeting expectations. * 6 students demonstrated weaker skills, averaging a decline of 10% on a 5-point scale.   We ran a correlation between the average oral communication score at degree completion and the # of online credits, and found a small (.12) Pearson’s correlation, where students who took more online hours demonstrated higher average scores. | The results of these direct measures have been shared with the Department Chairman and the Department’s Graduate Assessment and Curriculum Committee prior to submission to CASA. The results of this report are also shared and discussed with the entire department. |

**PART TWO**

Describe your program’s assessment accomplishments since your last report was submitted. Discuss ways in which you have responded to the CASA Director’s comments on last year’s report or simply describe what assessment work was initiated, continued, or completed.

The past two years of assessment data indicate relatively stable results, but also point to some important changes to be discussed further below, in Part Three. In 2015-2016, we noted a decrease in student performance on comprehensive exams, following a trend from previous assessment cycles. We implemented major curricular changes beginning in Fall 2016, with the addition of an online MA option in Political Science, focusing on Public Administration and Public Policy (maintaining a face-to-face Political Science MA). Additionally, we removed the comprehensive exam option for degree completion, and implemented a capstone project—an applied or empirical research or policy paper as a thesis alternative.

Due to the new curriculum, our enrollment has grown from an average of 27 to about 45 students, and continues to grow. With that growth, we are enrolling more non-traditional graduate students, including late-career graduate students, first generation, minorities, and veterans. We have worked to provide them with the resources for graduate school success, including a D2L orientation/resource page for all students, mentoring from the graduate coordinator and graduate faculty, and multiple means of communication with students. We are pleased to see that so far, there are minimal differences between student assessment scores between our online and face-to-face options. Additionally, while it is a bit premature to assess the results, anecdotal evidence indicates that students are completing their capstone projects at a faster rate, and mostly with higher or stable scores, compared to the comprehensive exam option. In the previous 1-year assessment report, we examined 8 students who completed their degree, compared to 22 in this 2-year cycle—a 37.5% increase in the average number of students completing their degrees.

Finally, these past two years, we had excellent job and Ph.D. placements with our graduates, including Purdue University and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Two students received the Robert and Kathryn Augustine Thesis Award of Excellence, one student received a King-Mertz award for a non-thesis research paper, and another student was admitted to the Hamand Society, recognizing research and commitment to service.

**PART THREE**

Summarize changes and improvements in **curriculum, instruction, and learning** that have resulted from the implementation of your assessment program. How have you used the data? What have you learned? In light of what you have learned through your assessment efforts this year and in past years, what are your plans for the future?

Assessment has led us to make the following changes:

* We are working to improve the delivery of high-quality Master’s level research methods training. Our students still need to work to develop their research methods skills. This fall, we will offer two different research methods class. A face-to-face version will be ideal for students completing the thesis option, and seeking Ph.D. placement or careers requiring data analytics. The new online research methods class will be geared towards applied research methods, focusing on teaching students how to use software that they typically would have on the job, and geared towards more mixed methods.
* To provide two different research methods courses, we are no longer offering PLS 5001/Introduction to Political Research. The content from that course will be integrated into the two new (or revised) research methods courses, as well as our D2L Graduate Student Orientation and Resources page.
* Our entry-level assessment of students in PLS 5001 will no longer be possible, requiring a revised assessment plan. At this point, we would like to have faculty assess a written (and presented) project during a student’s first semester, from any of their classes. This actually might be an improved measure over PLS 5001, as not all students began the program in the semester in which PLS 5001 was offered.
* We have removed the thesis option for online students, recognizing that we do not currently have the capacity to mentor 6-credit research projects in an online setting. Online option students will complete the capstone project, which still provides a rich research experience.

We have the following plans for the next assessment cycle:

* We just had an accelerated graduate program approved so that undergraduates can apply to take up to 9 credits of graduate classes as undergraduates. We will need to design a plan to assess the impact of this program.
* We will be integrating more resources from Booth Library and Career Services into our online classes, and hope to integrate more services from the Writing Center too.
* As the online option matures, we plan to administer a student survey and alumni survey, to gain more indirect, but valuable evidence about the graduate options we offer. The student survey may be particularly helpful to gauge the accessibility of EIU resources in an online setting.