

From: Alexander Nagel [remote]
To: Fitzpatrick
Date: 4/26/98 12:53pm
Subject: Assessment Report from the IR Program -Reply

April 26, 1998

Mary Anne,

Presumably this should have gone to you. I've made a copy if you have any difficulty in reading this.

Alex

>>> michael barnett <mbarnett@polisci.wisc.edu> - 4/25/98 6:49 PM
>>>
College of Letters and Science
Assessment Report

Department or Program Name: International Relations

Abstract: This is an assessment report for the International Relations

Major. We used conducted undergraduate surveys, surveyed reviewed international relations programs at other universities, and reviewed academic actions. Although our assessment suggests that we are doing quite well, we did identify several concerns: 1) an overall weakness in advising; 2) the need to provide students mechanisms to pull together their interdisciplinary experience; and, 3) some courses that are required or in high demand are not taught frequently enough. Our ability to satisfactorily or quickly address these problems is limited because of lack of resources and because we are wholly dependent on the decisions and activities taken by other departments. That said, there are some modest measures we can undertake. We have taken action to improve the advising situation, students have expressed real satisfaction over the last few months, and we intend to keep this moving in the right direction. To give students an opportunity to integrate their coursework, we are exploring the possibility of introducing a core course for the major. Finally, we are in the midst of a strategic review that is attending to the identified weaknesses and contemplating new initiatives to strengthen the major.

Assessment Tools Used:

Direct Indicators

	Undergraduate Major	Graduate Program
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National Exams

Local Exams _____

Capstone Course(s) _____

Embedded Testing _____

Student Portfolios _____

Review theses & dissertations _____

Performance Evaluations _____

Pre and Post Testing _____

Indirect Indicators _____

Undergraduate Graduate
Major Program

Student Surveys Did in 1998 _____

Exit Interviews _____

Alumni Surveys _____

Employer Surveys _____

External Reviews Strategic Review _____

Narrative:

International Relations Major
College of Letters and Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

ASSESSMENT REPORT

APRIL 1998

This document is a brief report of the assessment activities undertaken by the International Relations Major in accordance with the assessment program submitted in December 1996 and as stipulated by the College of Letters and Sciences. These assessment activities coincide with a broader strategic review currently being undertaken by the Major. Therefore, this report will include a consideration of the central elements of that review and their relationship to the assessment activities.

Assessment Activities

The IR Major has worked along several fronts to probe areas of strength and weakness, surveying the opinions of our undergraduates,

the architecture of other international relations programs at other universities, and the pattern of academic actions taken for our majors. We conducted a survey of current IR majors, ascertaining their generalized views on the program. Several conclusions follow. First, the vast majority of students enjoy the IR major and its interdisciplinary approach to world politics. Second, students express modest frustration with the lack of courses in several of our tracks. Third, students would like to see greater resources for advising, a greatly felt need in their view because of the interdisciplinary nature of the major. Fourth, students view the IR major as lacking "coherence" at the margins; indications are that this view results from the fact that they choose courses from several departments but have no opportunity to "integrate" their intellectual experiences. These criticisms aside, we are pleased that our students held a fairly positive image of the major.

We also have conducted a brief survey of IR programs at other universities and colleges. Four issues emerged. First, less than half of these programs have courses of their own, and only a handful of those have an introductory core course. Second, most introductory core courses either are indistinguishable from that offered by political science or offer a survey of the development of the global politics from three or fewer different disciplines. Third, many of the programs undergoing reform are attempting to broaden the study of international relations away from its political science roots and toward a truly interdisciplinary undertaking; this change is clearly evident in the handful of introductory courses that been developed over the last couple of years.

Finally, we reviewed the academic actions, that is, the pattern of substitutions permitted, for our majors. Our intent was to discern the availability of courses required for the major. Two patterns emerged.

First, the Middle Eastern track experienced the most substitutions per student. Second, many political science courses that are required for the major have been either unavailable or infrequently taught (a concern raised by many in the survey).

Areas of Adjustment

The surveys that we conducted highlighted three principal areas of weakness - advising, lack of coherence in the major, and the lack of availability of required courses. Although these problems were consistent with our expectations, we were surprised by the intensity of opinion. We are attempting to correct these problems. That said, our ability to satisfactorily or quickly address these problems is limited because we are resource poor and wholly dependent on the decisions and activities taken by other departments.

Students expressed real dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of advising. We have been aware of this problem for some time and have worked hard to improve our services. Indeed, over the last several months students have expressed real satisfaction with the quality of advising. We have every hope that this upward trajectory

will continue. As it happens, we are currently searching for a new adviser and thus hope that the quality will improve. There will not be more advising hours, however. In the past our adviser was 60% time on an annual contract; we will be replacing the adviser at 50% time on a 9-month contract. Parenthetically, the reduction in advising resources also means that we will not have the staff support required to undertake many new initiatives.

Students also noted that they would like to see ways to better integrate intellectually the IR major. Although they enjoyed the diversity of courses and disciplines, such an approach left them longing to discover the forest after having identified the trees. Our strategic review includes three ways to try and bring coherence to the program and reacquaint our students with the forest. One way of bringing more coherence to the major is by offering a core introductory course. We are beginning to examine how we might introduce such a course, the resources available for such an initiative, and its sustainability. Also, we have begun to offer topics courses for our students. These quasi-capstone seminars are intended to give students an opportunity to bring together their curricular experience in a small seminar, writing-intensive format. We are now in the second semester of offering such courses, and student response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Finally, we are attempting to involve more faculty in the IR Major. Because we are dependent on the activities and initiatives of faculty who reside in other departments, the more we can involve other faculty in the curriculum of the IR Major the more likely our students will have an integrated experience. In the context of a strategic review, we also conducted an informal survey of faculty who have been involved in the IR major in one way or another. As we had hoped, the survey itself got many faculty to focus on the IR Major for the first time. In some cases those initial contacts have blossomed into more substantial conversations and plans concerning curricular collaboration.

Because we are an interdisciplinary major with no courses of our own, there is relatively little that we can do to address the availability of courses. Again, our students typically fingered political science courses, not a complete surprise given the depletion of political faculty teaching in that area. Our hope is that the recent hires in political science alongside additional hires will go a long way to satisfying student need.

At 09:40 PM 4/22/98 -0500, you wrote:
>To: Letters and Science Chairs
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>From: Alex Nagel, Associate Dean
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>Re: Electronic Version of the Assessment Report
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>In a February 16, 1998, memorandum, we had promised to send an
>electronic version of the Assessment Report that is due in South
Hall by
>May 1. I am attaching this electronic version below.
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>College of Letters and Science
>Assessment Report
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>(Due back to your Academic Associate Dean by May 1, 1998)
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>Department or Program Name:
>
>Abstract: (This should be a brief summary of no more than 300 words
>that can be used in the College's report to the Provost's Office.
The
>abstract should indicate the focus of assessment activities during
the
>1997-98 academic year. It should indicate what actions the
department or
>program is taking to change its program as a result of the
assessment.
>It should indicate whether the assessment was of the Undergraduate
>Major, the Graduate Program, or both.)
>
>Assessment Tools Used: (Using the attached chart, please specify
which
>assessment activities have taken or will take place in your
department
>or program. Indicate also the year when these activities took place
or
>will take place. If you used other tools, please describe them.)
>
>Direct Indicators
>
> Undergraduate Graduate
> Major Program
>
>National Exams _____
>
>Local Exams _____
>
>Capstone Course(s) _____
>
>Embedded Testing _____
>
>Student Portfolios _____
>
>Review theses & dissertations _____
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>Performance Evaluations _____
>
>Pre and Post Testing _____
>
>Indirect Indicators
>
> Undergraduate Graduate
> Major Program
>
>Student Surveys _____
>
>Exit Interviews _____
>
>Alumni Surveys _____
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>Employer Surveys _____
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>External Reviews _____
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>Narrative: (This should be a report, up to two pages in length,
giving
>the details of the assessment plan and assessment activities.)
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