

PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT FUNDS, 2002-2003

DEPARTMENT UNIT: Political Science

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Political Science constitutes a core liberal arts major that is of special interest to students interested in pursuing careers in government service, publically active nonprofit sector, teaching, and law. The emphasis is the curriculum is on developing basic analytic skills in the context of governmental affairs, international relations, and public policy. The goals of the major can be summarized as follows:

1. To acquaint students with the broad range of foci and skills for political analysis. For curricular purposes we have divided our courses into four substantive areas, with students required to take at least one course from each area:
 - a. Political theory and philosophy
 - b. American government and politics
 - c. Comparative (non-American) government and politics
 - d. International relations

2. To provide students with skills in critical and analytic thinking to understand the complexity of issues in one or more areas of political life (broadly defined). This involves the following subcomponents:
 - a. An ability to frame questions about government and politics.
 - b. An ability to identify sources of information available to provide possible answers to those questions.
 - c. An ability to evaluate evidence in support or opposition to the possible answers.
 - d. An understanding of the inherent uncertainty regarding answers to most of the issues related to government and political life.

The nature of the above goals precludes assessment based on any type of traditional testing modality. If a large proportion of our undergraduate majors took a small, identifiable set of capstone courses, we could in principle build into those courses some vehicle that would serve a partial assessment purpose; to date, our efforts to get significant numbers of seniors into such courses have not been successful. However, even if we had such courses (and at present, we can't afford to teach them with our current number of majors and current faculty size), an assessment based entirely on feedback from and/or evaluation of students at the end of the college career would provide at best a partial picture of our success in achieving the goals outlined above.

For both of these reasons, in the past we have used a survey-based approach to assessing our programs. As part of our assessment activities during the 1997-98 academic year, the Department of Political Science drafted and sent out surveys to three different student populations: 1) an e-mail survey to undergraduate political science majors who expected to graduate in 1998; 2) a mail survey of political science majors from the Class of 1994; and 3) Ph.D. graduates from 1978 to 1998. For undergraduates graduating in 1998, we included 18 close-ended questions that asked students about majoring in political science, what they thought they learned, and the advising they received from faculty, staff, and graduate student TAs in the

Department. Four open-ended questions also asked students whether or not they would major in political science if they had it to do all over again (and why), what they would recommend to improve the program for future majors, additional resources they wished the Department had available, and suggestions about the Department's major requirements. For the survey sent to the Class of 1994, close-ended questions asked for feedback in four areas: majoring in political science; knowledge of political science topics, thinking skills and political activity; job preparation; and graduate or professional school preparation. In the open-ended questions we asked the graduates about what they are currently doing, training from their political science major that they have found useful, training from the Department that they wish they would have had, and general recommendations for improving the undergraduate program. The survey of former graduate students was more open-ended, asking how well the graduates thought our program prepared them in their substantive area(s) of specialization, research methodology, and teaching and how they felt about the mentoring and advising they received in the Department. In all three instances the surveys produced useful feedback to the Department concerning the effectiveness of its instruction. A 50-page report of the results was presented to the Department in August 1998 and served as the basis for a discussion about how we might improve our graduate and undergraduate programs.

This proposal seeks to repeat the surveys of our undergraduates, focusing on obtaining information from three cohorts: political science majors in the graduating Class of 2003; political science majors among the Class of 1999; and political science majors in the Class of 1995 (For this round of assessment, we will omit assessment of our former Ph.D. students, since the previous assessment generated sufficient information for those purposes, and the situation has not significantly changed since then). These three cohorts should give us a good picture of how evaluations of our program have or have not shifted over time as students move into the job world, as well as how student assessments of the program have changed or remained stable over time. In addition, we hope to collect valuable suggestions for how we might improve our academic program so as to aide our graduates in their subsequent careers.

Specifically, after reviewing and revising our previous survey instruments (See Appendix I for an example of our previous survey instrument), we will send an email survey to the entire Class of 2003 and a mail-in survey to 200 members each from the Classes of 1995 and 1999. Samples would be generated through the Alumni Records Office. Given our response rates from our previous assessment exercise (22 percent for the email survey, and 27 percent for the mail-in survey), this should generate enough responses to be able to draw some generalizations about the evolving state of the program.

Our Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) will serve as the unit overseeing and analyzing the surveys. The surveys will be conducted in Spring 2003 with the help of a half-time graduate student project assistant, who will prepare the survey, send it out, tabulate the results, and analyze the material. Based upon the analysis of the survey responses, the UPC will determine what, if any, adjustments the Department might want to make to the undergraduate program for majors in Political Science. In addition, the UPC will prepare a report summarizing the results of the survey. The UPC's summary and recommendation will go to the Department Faculty for discussion and action.

We estimate that the cost of this assessment project would be \$6,476. A detailed breakdown is provided in the attached budget.

It has been five years since we last conducted an assessment of our program, and therefore time once again to engage in an assesement. Our original assessment plan indicated that we would conduct these surveys once every two years. For financial reasons, this became impossible to carry out. We therefore ask for funding to defray the costs involved.

BUDGET
Political Science Assessment

.50 Project Assistant to carry out surveys \$5,190 + \$779 (15% Fringe Benefits)	\$5,969
Postage 400 2oz mailings at \$.57 each=\$228 400 1 oz return mailings at \$.34 each=\$136	\$ 364
Cost of obtaining mailing labels from Alumni Records	\$ 50
Copying (1600 copies)	\$ 40
Supplies (paper, envelopes)	\$ 53
 TOTAL	 \$6,476

Appendix I. Example of Previous Survey Instrument

Survey of Graduating Undergraduate Class of 1998 E-mail Survey

At 12:05 AM 4/22/98 -0500, you wrote:

To: Political Science Majors who expect to graduate in 1998

Greetings . . .

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation with a degree in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Presently, we in the Department of Political Science are looking for ways to improve the educational experience of undergraduates. Now that you are on the verge of completing your degree, we are interested in learning about your experiences as a Political Science major. Your evaluation and advice are essential to improve the Political Science program for students who follow you.

We would greatly appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to complete the survey that follows. You may e-mail your results back to me, or if you prefer, drop them in the campus mail to the address at the end of this letter. We have designed this process to guarantee that your responses will be kept confidential. As the Project Assistant in this evaluation, before presenting any results to members of the Political Science faculty, I will compile the replies into one document and only report back the aggregate results. Faculty will not have access to the names of the students who replied to the survey. If you have any questions about the process, just send me a message and I'll do my best to answer them for you.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. On behalf of the entire department I'd like to wish you the best of luck as you enter life after the UW.

SURVEY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJORS IN THE CLASS OF 1998

This survey is divided into two parts. Questions in Part I are closed-ended; please respond by using the 7-point scale below. Questions in Part II ask for your open-ended comments.

PART I: CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

For each question that follows, please respond by using the following scale:

- 0 -- Does not apply
- 1 -- Agree Strongly
- 2 -- Agree
- 3 -- Agree Weakly
- 4 -- Neutral
- 5 -- Disagree Weakly
- 6 -- Disagree
- 7 -- Disagree Strongly

A. Majoring in Political Science

- 1. I feel positive about having majored in political science.
- 2. I benefited from the lecture/seminar courses I took in the Dept. of Political Science.
- 3. I benefited from the research internships I took in the Dept. of Political Science.
- 4. I benefited from the directed reading courses I took in the Dept. of Political Science.
- 5. I wish I had pursued an additional degree or certificate to increase my flexibility.

B. Knowledge, Skills, and Activity

My political science major helped me to become . . .

- 6. knowledgeable of the content (i.e.: theories, controversies, facts) of political science.
- 7. a better critical thinker.
- 8. a better writer.
- 9. a better speaker and listener.
- 10. more able to understand political information in the popular press/media.

- 11. more interested in politics.
- 12. more involved in politics.

C. Advising

Generally, across all sources in the Department of Political Science . . .

- 13. I was satisfied with the advising I received about fulfilling my political science major.
- 14. I was satisfied with the advising I received about careers and post-graduate opportunities.

In terms of specific sources for advice in the Department of Political Science . . .

- 15. the Political Science Undergraduate Advisor was a helpful source.
- 16. course instructors were helpful in giving advice to me when I asked for it.
- 17. teaching assistants or other graduate students were helpful sources.
- 18. I wish I had had a specific faculty advisor.

PART II OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The following questions ask for your open-ended comments and ideas.

1. Knowing what you know now about the UW-Madison and the Department of Political Science, if you had it to do all over, would you major in political science again? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, would you recommend changing about the undergraduate program in the Political Science Department to improve the experiences of political science majors?
3. What resources, services, or courses do you wish the Department of Political Science offered that it presently does not?
4. Do you have any opinions or suggestions about the Political Science Department's major requirements?
5. Any other comments?