

POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Political Science department is the largest major in Letters and Science. At its peak, there were approximately 1200 undergraduate majors; the current number (Spring 2009) is about 1000 majors. The department also teaches many students: enrollments for undergraduate courses in the last year averaged about 5900 students per semester.

Student assessment is especially challenging for such a large major. Where other departments have instituted capstone courses, for example, such a requirement would be extremely difficult to implement for a major as large as political science since it would require many more faculty and other resources. Instead, we rely on other measures of student assessment.

- 1) Data analysis: We make extensive use of analysis of university data to assess our program. For example, we run data analyses to see if our undergraduate majors differ significantly from majors in other departments in terms of time to completion and cumulative GPA. Data analysis can also be used to track course offerings and course size to ensure that students have sufficient access to courses that reflect student interests and to enable completion of the program in a timely fashion.
- 2) Course evaluations: The department conducts online course evaluations for both faculty and teaching assistants every semester. These evaluations are used for assessing teaching quality for faculty tenure and promotion. They are also part of a system used for evaluating graduate student teaching performance.
- 3) Small group meetings: We have periodically attended meetings of our honors society, Pi Sigma Alpha, and the chair held a listening session for majors this semester to try to gain more detailed student feedback about the major. These discussions have yielded suggestions that have been important for student services, such as changes in the format of the website, advising hours, and the means for communication of announcements for majors.
- 4) Graduating senior survey: Besides the student course evaluations that are done every semester, the department conducted a graduating senior survey in the spring of 2006. We will be conducting another such survey this year. The senior survey has been useful in providing information about graduating seniors' career and education plans immediately after graduation. In addition, the survey provided useful suggestions for changes. Thus, in our last major review of the undergraduate curriculum in the spring of 2005, the Undergraduate Program Committee referred to such a survey of graduating seniors which found that, "Students frequently mentioned that they were routinely in classes of 60 or more, and felt they never had classes in which they could have small group discussion and interaction with faculty..." The Committee recommended that more small enrollment courses be offered. Thus, increasing numbers of faculty offer small seminar courses every semester. As a result, the department's small course offerings have increased from under 10% to about 15% of upper level courses in the major (numbered 300 and above). The expectation is that the larger number of small courses will provide more of our majors with the opportunity for increased class participation and faculty contact that smaller courses provide.

Finally, we are examining other methods of assessment, such as focus groups and utilizing material from the university's own survey of seniors regarding post-graduation plans, to provide more information about the quality of the major.