Annual Assessment Report Template

This form is intended to facilitate reporting program outcomes assessment to accrediting agencies, Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Committee, and other internal or external audiences.

The department mission statement, PLO's, curricular map and multi-year assessment plan should to be posted on the departmental website.

Department: Political Science
Date: 9-12-14
Department Chair: Susan Penksa

Department Assessment Lead: Tom Knecht

I. **Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment**

Program Learning Outcome	**Students will use valid and established social science methodology in their research (Critically trained).**
Who is in Charge	**Tom Knecht**
Direct Assessment Methods	**The Political Science Department used two direct assessment methods. First, we applied the AAC&U's "Inquiry and Value Rubric" to assess student research papers in Prof. Knecht's POL 111: *American Foreign Policy* course (see the paper prompt in Appendix A; see the rubric in Appendix B). Using this method, we observed how seventeen upper-division, political science majors put their knowledge of social science methods to use in crafting a 15-25 page paper.** **Second, we used a pre/post-test design to test students' knowledge of social science methods. This process is as follows: 1) all students (usually first-years or sophomores) enrolled in POL 40: *Empirical Political Research* (the department's required methods course) take a pre-test the first day of class; 2) the POL 40 Final Exam asks questions similar to those asked in the pre-test; and, finally, 3) upper-division students in Prof. Penksa's POL 123 course (Spring 2013) and Prof. Knecht's POL 111 course (Spring 2014) took a similar, non-graded post-test. The nature of this design allows us to assess 1) how much students know about research methods prior to taking POL 40, 2) how much they learn in POL 40, and 3) how much information they retain as upper-division students.**
Indirect Assessment Methods	
Major Findings	**Overall, our findings were mixed. The "Rubric" method of assessment uses a scale of 1 (Developing) to 4 (Capstone) to assess student work along six criteria. The average rubric scores were as follows: Topic Selection = 3; Existing Knowledge = 2.5; Design = 2.4; Analysis = 2.3; Conclusions = 2.5; and Limitations and Implications = 2.3 (see Appendix C). The POL 111 class was roughly divided between those students who wrote a qualitative paper and those who wrote a quantitative paper. Comparing rubric scores from these two groups yielded no statistically significant difference in paper quality. We**

	were rather disappointed in the mediocre quality of research design and analysis, which is the major focus of POL 40. Finally, it is important to note that there was a large variance around the mean: some papers exhibited graduate-level sophistication, while others were clearly not ready for prime-time. The pre/post-test design also yielded several interesting findings (see **Appendix D** for aggregate results). First, the analysis shows that students learn a lot in POL 40. While incoming students averaged only 48 percent on the pre-test, they scored 83 percent on their final exam. Second, much of the knowledge gained in POL 40 seems to be lost by the time students enter their junior or senior years. For instance, our upper-division students averaged only 67 percent when they retook the post-test, a loss of 16 points since the time they left POL 40. Finally, disaggregating the data by question reveals that students at all levels still struggle with certain aspects of social science methodology, such as interpretation of quantitative statistics.
Closing the Loop Activities	The Political Science Department is taking several steps to close the loop. First, we have already discussed, and will continue to discuss, ways that we can increase student retention of social science research methods. This includes offering students more opportunities to conduct research and to read quantitative research, and more consistent emphasis of methodology in our upper-division courses. Second, Drs. Penksa and Knecht have discussed ways to better connect (pun intended) what students are learning in POL 40 with what we are doing in our upper-division courses. We believe that considerable improvement will come from very simple changes, like using consistent terminology (e.g., using the phrase "qualitative methods" instead of "case study methods"). Third, the results suggest upper-division students need more guidance and review on research methods than we've been giving them. Our hope had been that POL 40 would give students the tools necessary to conduct meaningful research so that we could concentrate on other things in our upper-division courses. This clearly has not panned out as we had hoped and suggests more reviews of methodology are in order. Fourth, we will continue to build and learn from our pre/post dataset. The results have been very interesting and have already lead Prof. Knecht to change the way he teaches POL 40, which will hopefully improve student's understanding and retention.
Discussion	

II. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome	**We have not conducted an annual assessment since our six-year report; therefore we have no real PLO follow-ups to report.**
Who is in Charge	
Major Findings	
Closing the Loop Activities	
Discussion	

III.   Other assessment or key questions-related projects (optional)

Project	
Who is in Charge	
Major Findings	
Action	
Discussion	

IV. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

Appendix A.

Paper Guide
POL 111: American Foreign Policy
Professor Knecht
Spring 2014

Overview

You will write an original 15-25 page paper on American foreign policy. You will also have considerable leeway in formulating a research topic and are free to choose between quantitative, qualitative, or experimental methods. This guide will help you along the way.

Task 1. Research Design (Due Jan 21)

For this task, you will specify your research question and describe your preliminary research design. You have considerable freedom to choose a research question of interest. However, you should be aware that formulating a good research question is always one of the most difficult tasks in writing a paper. Here are a few things to think about when posing a research question:

Research Question

Pose a question, not a topic. Think of your research in terms of a question that requires an answer instead of a topic to be discussed. The subtle difference in mindset will alter the way you approach your research. Consider the difference between these two statements: "Did public opinion influence the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq?" vs. "My paper is on public opinion and foreign policy." The former statement poses an interesting theoretical question that is bounded; the later statement is vague and potentially unmanageable.

Is my research question too broad? Sometimes students select topics that are too broad to be answered in a term paper. For example, "what causes war?" is probably too big of a question to be covered in a mere 15 pages. A more manageable topic might be "why did the U.S. not intervene militarily in Darfur?"

Is there enough evidence (data) to examine my topic? Students often pose interesting research questions that simply cannot be answered with available data. For instance, the question of whether the U.S. tried covert operations to topple Saddam Hussein is an interesting research question that probably cannot be answered because national security concerns restrict access to files. Before you start down a road of inquiry, check to see if enough evidence is available to answer the question.

Research Design
Research design refers to the methods and evidence you will use to write your paper. Your research design should include the following:

1) The method you will use. Will your paper be quantitative, qualitative, or experimental? Why have you selected this particular method?
2) The data you will use. How will you collect and analyze your data? If quantitative, which dataset will you use? If qualitative, which case studies will you conduct and why? If experimental, what is the nature of your experiment and how will you recruit subjects.

What to Turn In. Your research design should be between 1-3 pages and should be turned in to Eureka before class.

Task 2. Literature Review (Due Mar 3)

There is no way of getting around the fact that doing secondary research is hard work; you will have to read a lot to get the information you need. Although you can use course readings for your paper, you are expected to conduct outside research. Your literature review should be between 4-7 pages and have at least 15 scholarly sources (Level I: peer reviewed) read outside of class. A good literature review will (1) summarize the current literature, (2) evaluate and critique this body of knowledge, and (3) motivate your current paper. You are expected to use proper APSA formatting.

You should also be aware that there is a "hierarchy" of sources in academia and different levels of this hierarchy are valuable for different sections of your paper.

Level I. Peer Reviewed Journals and Academic Books. Your paper should rely heavily on Level I sources, especially for your literature review and argument.

At least two experts in the field have evaluated articles that appear in peer-reviewed journals. The main peer reviewed journals in political science are: *American Journal of Political Science; American Political Science Review; International Organization; International Security; International Studies Quarterly; Journal of Peace Research; Journal of Conflict Resolution; International Studies Review; Political Science Quarterly; Public Opinion Quarterly; Security Studies*.

"Academic" books are often confused with "popular" books. Academic books are heavy on theory and evidence while popular books appeal to a mass audience and usually play loose with theory and evidence. For instance, *Power and Interdependence* by Keohane and Nye is an academic book; *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder* by Michael Savage is a popular book. Academic books are often, but not always, published by a university press (i.e., Cambridge University Press; Yale University Press), have a university professor as the author, and cite other academic works. Rely on academic books instead of popular books.

Level II. Magazine and Newspapers. Magazines and newspapers are good for providing background information and evidence, but are not great sources for theory. Within magazines and newspapers, there is a hierarchy of sources. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are considered the "papers of record" in the United States. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. and World News Report* are good magazines.

Be careful of ideological bias when using newspapers and magazines. For instance, *The Weekly Standard* is conservative and *The Progressive* is liberal.

Lexis-Nexis is a good source for newspapers and journals.

Level III. Websites. Websites can be especially valuable sources of data and information. However, there is a great variety in the Internet: some sites are good, some are not so good. Be very selective when doing research via the Internet. If your paper has a heavy dose of websites as sources, it raises a red flag. Avoid citing wikepedia.com.

What to Turn In. Turn in a Word copy of your literature review to Eureka. Your literature review should be between 4-7 pages with proper APSA citations. Your paper will be evaluated on both content and style.

Task 3. Formulating an Argument

There is a large section on formulating an argument and writing a thesis statement on Eureka. Here are a few additional comments:

Make an argument. Your paper should have a coherent argument and should be falsifiable.

Be original. Your paper should try to make an original contribution to the literature. In other words, do not simply recite what others have written.

Avoid writing an "opinion paper." Your paper should largely be non-normative. Normative views should be left to the conclusion.

Stay on track. Many papers wonder away from the main point. Write your research question and your answer on a separate piece of paper and refer to it often. If you find you are spending a lot of time on an issue that is unrelated to your question and thesis, stop and refocus.

Defeat rival hypotheses. Foreign policy events are overdetermined, meaning that there are multiple explanations for each phenomenon. As a result, there will always be other theories and perspectives that will challenge your own. A good rhetorical technique is to anticipate objections to your work by analyzing your own argument. Then try to answer these objections.

Task 4. Research

This is a major research project and, as such, I expect you to spend significant time conducting research. This means you must start early, set deadlines for yourself, and complete the research in plenty of time to actually write the paper. I am happy to help you if you need assistance.

Task 5. Writing your paper.
(Rough Draft Due Apr 14; Peer Reviews Due April 17; Final Paper Due April 25)

Writing a quality paper takes a lot of work: you have to outline, write, revise, get comments from others, revise again, and then revise some more. To help you in this process, you will hand in an initial draft on Apr 14. A peer will review your work and offer suggestions. You are then expected to revise your paper and turn it into Eureka on April 24. Here is the basic outline of a research paper:

- Introduction
  - Thesis
  - Road map
- Literature Review
- Theory
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion (optional)
- Conclusions

Task 6. Peer Review (Due Apr 17)

You are expected to review a fellow student's paper and provide comments. All comments should be made electronically using Microsoft Word's editor function. Your comments should incorporate both substantive and stylistic suggestions. You are expected to be a firm, yet encouraging, editor.

Paper Requirements

Your paper will be graded on the quality of the writing as well as the quality of the argument.

- The paper will be at least 15 pages.
- Use headings and subheadings as needed.
- Citations. You are free to use any acceptable form of citation (footnotes, MLA, Chicago etc…). My personal preference is to use parenthetical notation with a bibliography. In this method of citing, you write the authors' last name, date of publication and page number with the punctuation after the parentheses (Knecht 2004: 12). If you are paraphrasing, you do not have to use quotations but do have to cite (Smith 2003: 2). "Direct quotes need to have quotation marks and the parenthetical notation goes outside the quote" (George 2004:23). If you are communicating a finding or theory that other scholars have come up with, make sure you cite each relevant author (Bradley 1999; Jones 2004; Smith 2003). The full citation will appear in the bibliography
- Plagiarism. Do not do it. I check the authenticity of students work. Any questions on what constitutes plagiarism please see me.
- Late work is penalized one letter grade per day.
- All papers should be typed. Use normal margins (1") and font (12 point) and double-space. Include page numbers. Do not submit your paper in a binder or folder, just staple.
- A good resource on writing is: Hacker, Diana (1999). A Writer's Reference. (4th ed). Boston: Bedford/St.Martins.

Deadlines [all due by the start of class unless otherwise noted]

Jan 27. Research Design (5 pts)
Feb 24. Literature Review (10 pts)
Apr 14. Rough Draft (10 pts)
Apr 17. Peer Reviews by 5pm (10 pts)
Apr 25. Final Paper by 5pm (65 pts)

INQUIRY AND ANALYSIS VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

AAC&U
Association
of American
Colleges and
Universities

The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can by shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Definition

Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

Framing Language

This rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of disciplines. Since the terminology and process of inquiry are discipline-specific, an effort has been made to use broad language which reflects multiple approaches and assignments while addressing the fundamental elements of sound inquiry and analysis (including topic selection, existing, knowledge, design, analysis, etc.) The rubric language assumes that the inquiry and analysis process carried out by the student is appropriate for the discipline required. For example, if analysis using statistical methods is appropriate for the discipline then a student would be expected to use an appropriate statistical methodology for that analysis. If a student does not use a discipline-appropriate process for any criterion, that work should receive a performance rating of "1" or "0" for that criterion.

In addition, this rubric addresses the **products** of analysis and inquiry, not the **processes** themselves. The complexity of inquiry and analysis tasks is determined in part by how much information or guidance is provided to a student and how much the student constructs. The more the student constructs, the more complex the inquiry process. For this reason, while the rubric can be used if the assignments or purposes for work are unknown, it will work most effectively when those are known. Finally, faculty are encouraged to adapt the essence and language of each rubric criterion to the disciplinary or interdisciplinary context to which it is applied.

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- Conclusions: A synthesis of key findings drawn from research/evidence.
- Limitations: Critique of the process or evidence.
- Implications: How inquiry results apply to a larger context or the real world.

INQUIRY AND ANALYSIS VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

Definition

Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3	Milestones 2	Benchmark 1
Topic selection	Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of the topic.	Identifies a focused and manageable/doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.
Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views	Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Presents information from irrelevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.
Design Process	All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed, however, more subtle elements are ignored or unaccounted for.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are missing, incorrectly developed, or unfocused.	Inquiry design demonstrates a misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework.

	from across disciplines or from relevant subdisciplines.			
Analysis	Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities.	Lists evidence, but it is not organized and/or is unrelated to focus.
Conclusions	States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.	States a conclusion focused solely on the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to the inquiry findings.	States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.	States an ambiguous, illogical, or unsupportable conclusion from inquiry findings.
Limitations and Implications	Insightfully discusses in detail relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Discusses relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents limitations and implications, but they are possibly irrelevant and unsupported.

B. Relevant assessment-related documents/samples (optional)

Appendix C: Rubric Evaluation of Student Papers in POL 111

Student	Topic Selection	Existing Knowledge	Design	Analysis	Conclusions	Limitations and Implications	Study
1	3	2	2	2	3	2	case study
2	3	2	1	2	2	2	Quantitative
3	3	3	3	3	2	3	Content Analysis
4	3	2	2	2	1	2	Quantitative
5	3	3	3	2	3	3	Quantitative
6	3	2	2	2	2	2	case study
7	3	2	2	2	3	2	case study
8	3	2	3	2	2	2	Quantitative
9	2	2	1	2	2	1	case study
10	3	3	3	3	3	3	Quantitative
11	3	3	3	3	3	3	Quantitative
12	4	4	4	4	4	3	case study
13	3	3	3	2	3	1	Quantitative
14	3	1	1	1	2	1	case study
15	3	3	4	4	3	3	case study
16	2	2	2	1	2	2	case study
17	4	3	2	2	3	4	Quantitative
	3.00	2.47	2.41	2.29	2.53	2.29	

APPENDIX D. PRE/POST DESIGN.

Question	Pre	Post	Upper Div	% Change Pre/Post POL 40	% Change Post POL 40/Upper Div
This study of knowledge asks the question: How do we know what we know?	0.78	0.96	0.86	0.19	-0.10
Independent Variable	0.83	0.93	0.86	0.11	-0.08
Normative	0.33	0.97	0.81	0.65	-0.16
Positivist Epistemology	0.39	0.93	0.67	0.55	-0.27
Values	0.66	0.92	0.57	0.26	-0.35
Hypotheses	0.70	1.00	0.90	0.30	-0.10
Null Hypothesis	0.53	0.99	0.90	0.46	-0.08
Dependent Variable	0.49	0.93	0.81	0.45	-0.12
Social and Natural Sciences	0.65	0.92	0.62	0.27	-0.30
Methodology	0.71	0.97	0.95	0.26	-0.02
External Validity	0.38	0.97	0.86	0.60	-0.12
Sample Size	0.63	0.93	0.86	0.31	-0.08
Sampling	0.86	0.99	1.00	0.12	0.01
Literature Review	0.68	0.96	0.90	0.29	-0.06
Methods Section	0.33	0.85	0.43	0.53	-0.43
Correlation and Causation	0.85	0.96	0.95	0.11	-0.01
Reliability: Example	0.61	0.66	0.33	0.05	-0.32
Indicator Validity: Example	0.24	0.58	0.57	0.34	-0.01
Social Desirability: Example	0.39	0.69	0.67	0.30	-0.02
Spurious Relationship: Example	0.48	0.76	0.76	0.28	0.00
Validity of Qualitative Methods	0.39	0.76	0.52	0.37	-0.24
Significance in Quantitative and Qualitative Methods	0.52	0.74	0.52	0.22	-0.22
Case Selection in Case Study Methods	0.18	0.52	0.43	0.34	-0.09

Selecting Cases in Case Study	0.06	0.72	0.33	0.66	-0.39
Process Tracing	0.39	0.88	0.57	0.49	-0.31
Content Analysis	0.55	0.93	0.67	0.39	-0.26
Intercoder reliability content analysis	0.27	0.80	0.62	0.53	-0.18
Codes in Content Analysis	0.67	0.93	1.00	0.26	0.07
Validity of Experimental Methods	0.09	0.72	0.38	0.63	-0.34
Treatment in Experimental Methods	0.06	0.76	0.52	0.70	-0.23
Random Assignment in Experimental Methods	0.94	0.97	0.90	0.03	-0.06
Experimental Methods and Labs	0.97	0.97	1.00	0.00	0.03
Validity of Quantitative Methods	0.30	0.76	0.62	0.46	-0.14
Statistical Significance--Interpretation	0.39	0.93	0.86	0.54	-0.08
Statistical Significance II--Interpretation	0.15	0.64	0.71	0.49	0.07
Unstandardized Beta--Interpretation	0.45	0.48	0.52	0.03	0.04
Unstandardized Beta II--Interpretation	0.09	0.48	0.00	0.39	-0.48
Standardized Coefficients—Interpretation	0.28	0.90	0.43	0.62	-0.47
Statistical Significance III--Interpretation	0.33	1.00	0.67	0.68	-0.33
Regression Coefficients--Interpretation		0.66	0.52		-0.13
Unstandardized Beta--Interpretation		0.52	0.24		-0.28
Political Institutions	0.57	1.00		0.43	
Critique of Positivist Epistemology	0.30	0.90		0.60	
Hypothesis	0.30	0.60		0.30	
Control Variables	0.21	1.00		0.79	
Threat to internal validity	0.09	0.60		0.51	
Confidence Interval	0.66	0.70		0.04	
Thesis Statement	0.81				
IR Levels of Analysis	0.55				
Rational Choice	0.38				
Chi-Square	0.32	0.85		0.53	
Margin of Error—Interpretation	0.23				
Mean--Interpretation		0.77			
Standard Deviation--Interpretation		0.92			

Means II--Interpretation		0.74			
Standard Deviation--Interpretation		0.73			
Statistical Significance--Interpretation	0.23	1.00		0.77	
Statistical Significance--Interpretation	0.66	0.55		-0.11	
Unstandardized Coefficient II—Interpretation.		0.64			
Statistical Significance--Interpretation		0.71			
The N		1.00			
Interpretation of standardized and unstandardized coefficients, slope—Interpretation		0.46			
Interpretation of standardized beta.		0.94			
Interpretation of standardized beta.		0.88			
R-squared_ Interpretation		1.00			
Qualitative Methodology		0.96			
Validity of Qualitative Methods		0.88			
Significance of Qualitative Methods		0.81			
Case Study Methods		0.65			
Case Selection		0.69			
Process Tracing		0.19			
Elite Interviews		0.81			
Elite Interviews II		0.77			
Content Analysis		0.77			
Validity of Experimental Methods		0.92			
IRB		0.88			
Confidential and Anonymous		0.92			
Writing Out Six Threats to Validity		0.73			
Average Score	0.48	0.83	0.67		