

Weber State University  
Biennial Report on Assessment of Student Learning

Cover Page

Department/Program: Political Science  
Academic Year of Report: 2022/2023(covering Summer 2022 through Fall 2023)  
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We have updated the Institutional Effectiveness website, which includes an update for each program page. All Biennial Assessment and Program Review reports will now be available on a single page. Please review your page for completeness and accuracy, and indicate on the list below the changes that need to be made. Access your program page from the top-level [results](#) page. Select the appropriate college and then your program from the subsequent page.

#### A. Mission Statement

Information is current; no changes required.

The WSU Political Science Department strives to embody and cultivate the habits and skills of clear thought, rigorous analysis, and effective argumentation in writing and speech. We examine politics at all levels: institutions, small groups, voters, social and political organizations, towns and cities, economic systems, countries, nations, transnational flows, and global environmental systems.

#### B. Student Learning Outcomes

(please note the addition of certificate and associate credential learning outcomes)

Information is current; no changes required.

#### Program Outcomes (adopted February 2023)

5= exceeds, 4 = meets, 3 = approaching, 2 = developing, 1 = does not meet, 0 = not observed

#### Values

##### *Cultivating Civic Dispositions*

Understand and model civic dispositions conducive to democratic involvement. Specifically, we recommend attention to fostering the civic attitudes of political efficacy, empathy, civic duty, civic confidence, and civic reflection, and an inclination to engage in dialogue across difference.

#### Skills

Political science students will demonstrate an ability to

1. Analyze political phenomena and critique arguments in a theoretically and empirically informed manner.
2. Engage as global citizens through problem solving, collective action, and collaborative decision making.

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3. Identify, evaluate, properly use, and cite verifiable sources of evidence.
4. Engage thoughtfully with competing values and perspectives.
5. Use qualitative and quantitative methods effectively and appropriately.
6. Communicate effectively in written and verbal modes to a variety of audiences.

## **Content**

Political science students will be able to

1. Understand and apply key concepts used to study political institutions, processes, and actors in a variety of settings.
2. Understand and evaluate diverse theoretical and disciplinary approaches to the nature, ethical distribution, and uses of power.
3. Understand, apply, and evaluate approaches and theories that address political phenomena.
4. Understand the different ways individuals and groups engage in politics at the local, regional, national, and global levels, and evaluate the effectiveness and effects of different strategies of civic engagement.

**C. Curriculum** (please note, we are using Google Sheets for this section so that updates are easier to make)

\_\_\_ **Information is current; no changes required.**

Our plan is to align outcomes to assignments, quizzes, and co-curricular activities as appropriate. But generally, we can articulate courses that would have program outcomes more likely to be learned. Can you please share the google sheet and we will update it.

**D. Program and Contact Information**

\_\_\_ **Information is current; no changes required.**

Program information:

Political science as a discipline is uniquely equipped to the cultivation of knowledgeable and participatory members of their communities. When students complete our major or one of our minors they will be empowered to be agents of change in their communities, nations, and the world at large. We contribute to the college, university, region, and state by examining critical questions about power and public life from local, national, transnational, global, and comparative perspectives in partnership with students and members of the community. We do so to foster the capacities of engaged and critical community members who actively pursue questions and meanings of political community, and civic life. We fully support Weber State University's commitment to quality teaching ([WSU mission statement](#)), and consistently support that broader mission in transforming lives by meeting all students where they are, and challenging and guiding them to achieve their goals academically and in life. We provide a safe and welcoming learning environment with experienced faculty where students are encouraged to think critically about the world and its problems and to interact intellectually with one another and their professors.

Contact information:  
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Program Website: <https://www.weber.edu/polsc/politicalscience.html>

### **E. Assessment Plan**

We have traditionally asked programs to report on outcome achievement by students at the course level. We are encouraging programs to consider alternative assessment approaches and plans that are outcome-based as opposed to course-based, though course-based assessment can continue to be used. A complete assessment plan will include a timeline (which courses or which outcomes will be assessed each year), an overall assessment strategy (course-based, outcome-based, reviewed juries, ePortfolio, field tests, etc.), information about how you will collect and review data, and information about how the department/program faculty are engaged in the assessment review.

**\_\_\_ Information is current; no changes required.**

In November, 2022, the WSU Political Science program adopted new learning outcomes, drafted in concert with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. In February, 2023, the American Political Science Association adopted discipline-wide learning outcomes. Our program adopted these outcomes. As a result, our assessment plan is to begin program wide assessment using the disciplinary outcomes. At this moment, we have one full semester of data with the discipline outcomes and one semester with the now retired outcomes. Our plan is to align our outcomes to formative and summative assessments throughout our program, so the unit of analysis will be the assessment, not the course.

Secondly, our assessment includes regularly reviewing our data and reflecting on how we could best meet the challenges and needs of our students.

### **F. Student Achievement**

## Additive Program Unit Percentages

Data for the most recent three years reflect in-progress students and may change over time

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
In 1 Year or Less	31%	50%	59%	40%	31%	70%	24%
In 2 Years or Less	31%	75%	86%	70%	44%	70%	24%
In 3 Years or Less	38%	79%	91%	70%	50%	70%	24%
At Any Point	46%	79%	91%	70%	50%	70%	24%
Has Not Graduated	54%	21%	9%	30%	50%	30%	76%

To a certain extent, we have not ever formally reflected on these numbers as a program. We will begin doing so at our next program meeting. Given that we have not done so before, we will begin with a conversation about why we are lower than the University or College averages when we are and why we are above when we are.

### Evidence of Learning

We will be conducting outcome-based assessment.

[Below is a link to the appendix with our data.](#) Please note that it has two different sets of outcomes because we adopted new ones, retired them, and then adopted the discipline outcomes. Our first goal is to get the entire program in compliance with using these outcomes. Right now, 33% of our faculty have used them. We will begin reflecting on our data regularly and given that reflection will be able to note the milestones across our program. We will begin with our POLS 1010 course, which is our entry-level and end with our POLS 4990, which is our capstone. With good data and reflective practices, we can note where we are losing students across our major and work to address those challenges.

Additional narrative (optional – use as much space as needed):

Given how late our discipline was to adopting learning outcomes, it is no surprise that WSU Political Science is behind a bit. Our primary goal at this point is to address our deficits in assessment, which have been spotty at best. We plan to embrace an across-the-board assessment and then reflection loop.

## Appendix A

Most departments or programs receive a number of recommendations from their Five/Seven-Year Program Review processes. This page provides a means of updating progress towards the recommendations the department/program is enacting.

Date of Program Review: March 18, 2022	Recommendation	Progress Description
Recommendation 1: assessment	We give priority and restate the recommendation in the last review for full faculty attention to assessment.	We have adopted the disciplinary outcomes and 1/3 of our faculty have used them in Canvas. Going forward, we will achieve more program wide compliance.
Recommendation 2: decentralize program responsibilities	Tasks that were previously the purview of the chair might now be shouldered by committees of the program faculty. We believe the benefits of this service, focused on your program and students as this critical juncture, will result in great dividends.	Our new program chair has moved to have more people involved with program assessment.
Recommendation 3: regular faculty meetings	We strongly recommend instituting regular faculty meetings. There are many routines likely to change hands that might benefit from fresh consideration by the full faculty together in the same room.	Our new program chair has instituted regular program meetings.
Recommendation 4: re-envision the student experience	We recommend capturing as much as information as possible from this graduating class to understand the changing experience more fully.	We have not turned our attention to this recommendation as we have prioritized getting our assessment house in order first. Once we are sure we are on the right path, we will turn to our next step success assessment.

Additional narrative:

## Appendix B

Please provide the following information about the full-time *and adjunct faculty* contracted by your department during the last academic year (summer through spring). Gathering this information each year will help with the headcount reporting that must be done for the final Five Year Program Review document that is shared with the State Board of Regents.

Faculty Headcount	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
With Doctoral Degrees (Including MFA and other terminal degrees, as specified by the institution)	7	7	7
Full-time Tenured	5	5	5
Full-time Non-Tenured (includes tenure-track)	1	1	1
Part-time and adjunct	1	1	1
With Master's Degrees	13	13	13
Full-time Tenured			
Full-time Non-Tenured			
Part-time and adjunct	13	13	13
With Bachelor's Degrees	0	0	0
Full-time Tenured			
Full-time Non-tenured			
Part-time and adjunct			
Other			
Full-time Tenured			
Full-time Non-tenured			
Part-time			
<b>Total Headcount Faculty</b>			
Full-time Tenured	5	5	5
Full-time Non-tenured	1	1	1
Part-time	14	14	14

**Please respond to the following questions.**

- 1) What support (from enrollment services, advising, first-year transition office, access & diversity, etc.) do you need to help your program recruit and retain students?

We need to begin our assessment/reflection data driven feedback loop before we can fully understand what we need from enrollment services, advising, first-year transition office, access & diversity, etc. Once we have some data, by our next program review, we will have a better sense of the support we need.

- 2) We have invited you to re-think your program assessment. What strategies are you considering? What support or help would you like?

We will be conducting outcome-based assessment going forward. Gail Niklason has already been most helpful figuring this out. What we will need is her input as we reflect on our data going forward.

- 3) Finally, we are trying to get a better handle on culminating academic experiences of our students. One of our proposed 'mission fulfillment metrics' (used for accreditation) and the measure is stated as:
  - a. A culminating measure (board exam, ePortfolio review, or other capstone experience) that demonstrates that 90% of students achieve program outcomes at a level of 80% or higher

Our students have a number of culminating experiences in the co-curricular area – Model UN, Internships, Moot Court. We also have students who are conducting undergraduate research and attending conferences with faculty. These are available to all students, but not all students partake. All students are also required to take the POLS 4990 course, which we have designed as our capstone experience.

- b. Departments will identify one or two upper division courses or end-of-program experiences that all or most students have to take that address all or most of the outcomes

Is this a reasonable expectation of your program? If so, can you please briefly describe the courses and experiences? If not, do you have a suggestion for a better way to assess student learning

We have a capstone experience: POLS 4990. This course is designed currently as an independent research project. At our first program meeting this year we discussed that some students are being lost as a result of it being independent research, so we are reinstating a POLS 4990 senior seminar experience. For the first, independent research, students choose a faculty member in a content area of their choice to write a 20-25 page paper with. Done well, a number of our skills and content program outcomes are met with this assignment. For the second, senior seminar, we will ask faculty who do not have as many students to work with on independent research papers to conduct senior seminar experiences for students. This is designed as a community of learning on a particular topic. Students would then be able to choose which experience fits best their abilities and interests.



## Assessment Data

Political Science 1100, Spring 2023

Outcome Assessment Report

Four sections (taught together via IVC), 34 students (plus one concurrent enrollment section?)

Outcomes measured using quizzes/exams with questions aligned to outcomes on six exams:

1. 94% of students achieved the outcome "1100\_4: Evaluate the founding documents" at a rate of 70% or higher
2. 95% of students achieved the outcome "1100\_5: Evaluate how citizens are connected" at a rate of 70% or higher
3. 92% of students achieved the outcome "1100\_6: Evaluate how our federal institutions govern" at a rate of 70% or higher
4. 95% of students achieved the outcome "1100\_7: Evaluate how the American systems solves its collective problems" 70% or higher

Outcomes measured using eleven assignments with aligned outcomes:

Learning Outcomes	0	1	2	3	4	5	(blank)	Grand Total	Perc_Mastery
1100_1: Apply important American political concepts	1	1	10	42	261	98	3	416	86.92%
1100_2: Analyze current political events		6		28	183	26	2	245	86.01%
1100_3: Create an individual political identity		1	2	10	52	61	2	128	89.68%

Conclusions:

1. Overall
  - a. students are meeting or exceeding outcome 1100\_1 at a rate of 87%.
  - b. Students are meeting or exceeding outcome 1100\_2 at a rate of 86%
  - c. Students are meeting or exceeding outcome 1100\_3 at a rate of 90%
2. By Student
  - a. 83.3% of students achieved outcome 1100\_1 at a rate of 70% or higher
  - b. 86.4% of students achieved outcome 1100\_2 at a rate of 70% or higher

92.4% of students achieved outcome 1100\_3 at a rate of 70% or higher

Political Science 3640, Spring 2023  
 Outcome Assessment Report  
 One section, 12 students

1) Outcomes measured using six **assignments** with aligned outcomes:

Learning Outcome	2	3	4	5	Grand Total	Perc_Mastery
PolSci 3 - subfield mastery		2	7	3	12	83.33%
PolSci 4 - analytic and critical thinking	2	12	39	15	68	79.41%
UD_1: Apply important American political concepts	2	12	39	15	68	79.41%

Outcomes measured using quizzes/exams with questions aligned to outcomes on three exams:

- 83.3% of students achieved the outcome "PolSci 3 - subfield mastery" at a rate of 80% or higher
- 50% of students achieved the outcome "PolSci 4 - analytic and critical thinking" at a rate of 80% or higher
- 50% of students achieved the outcome "UD\_1: Apply important American political concepts" at a rate of 80% or higher

2) Outcomes measured using **quizzes/exams** with questions aligned to outcomes on three exams:

POLS 3640 Fall 22 Exams	0	1	Grand Total	Perc_Mastery
PolSci 3 - subfield mastery	15	33	48	68.75%
PolSci 4 - analytic and critical thinking	26	118	144	81.94%
UD_1: Apply important American political concepts	26	118	144	81.94%
UD_2: Analyze current political events	2	46	48	95.83%

## Glossary

### Student Learning Outcomes/Measurable Learning Outcomes

The terms ‘learning outcome’, ‘learning objective’, ‘learning competency’, and ‘learning goal’ are often used interchangeably. Broadly, these terms reference what we want students to be able to do AFTER they pass a course or graduate from a program. For this document, we will use the word ‘outcomes’. Good learning outcomes are specific (but not too specific), are observable, and are clear. Good learning outcomes focus on skills: knowledge and understanding; transferrable skills; habits of mind; career skills; attitudes and values.

- Should be developed using action words (if you can see it, you can assess it).
- Use compound statements judiciously.
- Use complex statements judiciously.

### Curriculum Grid

A chart identifying the key learning outcomes addressed in each of the curriculum’s key elements or learning experiences (Suskie, 2019). A good curriculum:

- Gives students ample, diverse opportunities to achieve core learning outcomes.
- Has appropriate, progressive rigor.
- Concludes with an integrative, synthesizing capstone experience.
- Is focused and simple.
- Uses research-informed strategies to help students learn and succeed.
- Is consistent across venues and modalities.
- Is greater than the sum of its parts.

### Target Performance (previously referred to as ‘Threshold’)

The level of performance at which students are doing well enough to succeed in later studies (e.g., next course in sequence or next level of course) or career. Ideally, thresholds are stated as the percentage of students who achieve a specified level of performance For example:

- 75% of students score at least 75%
- 80% of students achieve mastery where mastery is defined as 4 on a 5 point scale

### Actual Performance

How students performed on the specific assessment. An average score is less meaningful than a distribution of scores (for example, 72% of students met or exceeded the target performance, 5% of students failed the assessment).

### Closing the Loop

The process of following up on changes made to curriculum, pedagogy, materials, etc., to determine if the changes had the desired impact.

An idea with roots in manufacturing, that promotes the ongoing effort to improve. Continuous improvement uses data and evidence to improve student learning and drive student success.

#### Direct evidence

Evidence based upon actual student work; performance on a test, a presentation, or a research paper, for example. Direct evidence is tangible, visible, and measurable.

#### Indirect evidence

Evidence that serves as a proxy for student learning. May include student opinion/perception of learning, course grades, measures of satisfaction, participation. Works well as a complement to direct evidence.

#### HIEE – High Impact Educational Experiences

Promote student learning through curricular and co-curricular activities that are intentionally designed to foster active and integrative student engagement by utilizing multiple impact strategies. Please see <https://weber.edu/weberthrives/HIEE.html>