Department of Political Science
College of Social Science
Undergraduate Bachelor's Degree in Political Science

Student Outcomes Assessment Plan (SOAP)

I. Mission Statement

The Department of Political Science at California State University, Fresno, is dedicated to teaching its undergraduate students the skills they need to confront the challenges of public governance and policy making in the 21st Century. The Department's students will be the new leaders of the Central Valley, California, and the United States. Courses and programs offered by the Department of Political Science help students achieve these goals by teaching them how to critically analyze political and ideological debates regarding important issues, understand the proper role political representation plays in a democratic society, design and enact public policy in the public interest, and effectively assess the consequences of those policies as they become political leaders, public managers, private sector attorneys, for- profit/nonprofit managers, and even professional scholars. The Department also helps students develop the inter-personal skills and experiences necessary for professional success in the public and private sectors. In sum, this mission of the department, along with the College of Social Sciences and Fresno State University, is to provide the highest quality education and training to our students.

II. Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

A. **Concepts: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and think critically about the main concepts and theories of the academic discipline of political science and major issues in American government and international affairs.**

1. Students will learn, explain, and analyze the primary concepts, analytical techniques, and theoretical and empirical literatures in the major subfields of the academic discipline of political science.

2. Students will be able to think critically about and discuss their critiques of the primary issues in American government and world affairs with these theories and techniques.

B. Tools: Students will acquire analytical and critical thinking skills in regards to political issues.

3. Students will be able to demonstrate a mastery of the critical political and policy evaluation skills and methods necessary to effectively present analyses of issues and policies and communicate in writing this information, and the arguments the information supports, in a professional fashion.

4. Students will show their ability to use professional statistical analysis tools to empirically analyze, and provide written conclusions about, issues in modern politics.

C. Professional Development: Students will learn about the many career options and professional development opportunities available to them in a variety of professional fields and academic disciplines for which they may seek employment with political science bachelor degrees.

5. Students will learn the knowledge and skills necessary for preparing to enter careers in government, public sector management, running for elected office, managing campaigns, as well as for being accepted into highly acclaimed graduate programs and law schools.

III. Curriculum Map (Matrix of Courses X Learning Outcomes) I = Introduced, R = Reinforced, E = Enhanced, M = Mastered					
Courses	Outcome 1 Concepts	Outcome 2 Concepts	Outcome 3 Tools	Outcome 4 Tools	Outcome 5 Professional Development
PLSI 001 Modern Politics	I	I	I	I	I
PLSI 002 American Government Institutions	I	I	I	I	I
PLSI 071 Introduction to Environmental Politics	I	R	I	I	R

PLSI 090 Methods of Analysis	I	R	I	R,E	R
PLSI 102 California Government and Institutions	R	E	R	R	R
PLSI 103 California Politics	R	E	R	R	R
PLSI 110 History of Political Thought I	R	E	E		E
PLSI 111 History of Political Thought II	R	E	E		E
PLSI 120 International Politics	R	R	R	R	E
PLSI 121 American Foreign Affairs	E	E	E	R	E
PLSI 126 International Law and Organization	E	E	E	R	E
PLSI 140 Approaches to Comparative	R	R	R	R	R

Politics					
PLSI 141 Russian Politics	E	M	E	R	E
PLSI 144 Area Studies in African and the Middle East	E	M	E	R	E
PLSI 147 East Asian Politics	E	M	E	R	E
PLSI 148 Latin America Politics	E	M	E	R	E
PLSI 150 Public Policy Making	M	E	M	M	E
PLSI 151 Political Participation and Parties	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 152 Public Opinion	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 153 Presidential Politics	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 154 Congressional Politics	E	E	E	E	E

PLSI 157 Environmental Politics	M	M	E	E	M
PLSI 160 State and Local Government	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 163 Municipal Government	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 170 Constitutional Law I	M	M	M		M
PLSI 171 Constitutional Law II	M	M	M		M
PLSI 174 Politics and the Court	E	E	E	E	E
PLSI 175 Water Politics and Policy	M	M	E	E	E

IV. Assessment Methods

A. Direct Measures

1. Pre and Post tests- The Political Science Department faculty have created a set of questions capturing the most crucial concepts students should learn in political science and testing their ability to use political science theories and statistical tools in critical analysis, reflecting the goals and objectives laid out above. This is knowledge all political science majors ought to have when they graduate from our program and is therefore a direct measure of outcomes 1, 3, and 4. Unlike the paper portfolios (see below), which are designed to assess

thinking ability and skill, this measure assesses the acquiring of knowledge.

The pre-test version of the test will be administered in PLSI 1, the first course that new majors take in political science. All students in the course will take the short test, but only tests for those with a declared major in political science will be kept and assessed. Each semester the Department receives a list of all students applying to graduate with a political science major. These students will be contacted and asked to take the same test once again (this is done by e-mailing the test to students, having them indicate their answers and e-mailing it back). Thus they take the same test twice, at the beginning and end of the major. If learning concepts occurred, the average student score in the post-test will be greater than in the pre-test. The faculty will then be presented summary data from these tests on an annual basis for assessing whether any changes need to be made to the curriculum.

Although student names will have to be used to connect the pre-test to the post-test, these names, along with the tests themselves, will be held in strict confidence by the faculty member designated by the Department as coordinator for the program. No other person will see the student names and all individual student data will be kept strictly confidential. Only aggregate statistics will be released.

The pre-tests and post-tests will be done every year and every year summary data will be presented to the department. While we certainly want each graduating student to get all of the questions on the post-test correct, if significant numbers of students get less than 70% of answers correct we will have a serious problem on our hands and need to take significant corrective action to our curriculum. Otherwise we will use these results to make only marginal adjustments to our curriculum.

It is worth noting that this knowledge measure is only used for internal department purposes, not as an assessment measure for purposes of accreditation by the Western Association of State Colleges.

2. Student Paper Portfolios- All students write research papers in our upper level undergraduate courses and this provides faculty an opportunity to assess their progress in learning how to think analytically, express abstract concepts, and conduct basic research from one core course to another across their time in the major. In other words, it assesses how well students have learned concepts that are the foundation of each student's development. It therefore provides a direct measure of outcomes 2 and 3. The ability to write well to convey ideas and arguments is also one of the most important tools students can develop as they prepare for careers or graduate school. These papers are major components of student grades in these courses, and usually they must get a C or better on the paper to pass the class. For purposes of assessment, however, we have created a rubric to analyze the papers and assess whether students are making progress in terms of developing their analytical thinking and writing skills.

Students majoring in political science in every upper division core course are required to turn in two copies of their paper, one of which is held in that student's file in the

department office until the time comes for assessment. Because papers are kept in the Department office in folders for each student, the assessment will involve reading an older (at least one year, though two is preferred) paper along with a new paper for each of the selected students in a random sample (we have too many majors to do them all). This way we can see if students are improving their writing skills over time as they take the upper-level courses. Responsibility for analyzing the papers is divided up among all tenured and tenure track faculty who then discuss the data yielded from the rubrics in a department meeting where changes will be considered to further improve student abilities.

3. Policy argument memos- All students must learn how to write short but effective arguments on what public issues are currently most important in local, state, national, or international politics, as well as take positions on what policies would best address those issues. To demonstrate how well they understand these concepts and can make effective arguments, they must learn how to develop and use the tool of the policy argument memo. It is therefore a direct measure of outcomes 2 and 5.

    All political science majors are required to take the course Public Policy Analysis (PLSI 150). A major component of this course is learning how to write a policy argument memorandum, done as an exercise in learning how to comprehend an important issue in contemporary politics, formulate a position, and communicate that position to public sector officials. This is something political science graduates frequently have to do in their professions.

    The Department has developed a rubric for assessing these memos that reflects how well each student understands the issue at hand, how well they lay out their position on the issue, and how clearly and concisely they communicate this understanding and position to public officials in the memorandum. The memorandum is added to each student's portfolio and a random sample are annually assessed using the rubric. The results are discussed at the end of every spring semester.

B. **Indirect Measure**

1. Alumni Survey- This will be administered once every four years using the e-mail addresses of alumni provided to us by the Alumni Office. The on-line survey assesses student success in finding employment, the careers paths taken by older alums, and alumni feedback as to whether they felt they received the necessary training in our undergraduate program. It is therefore an indirect measure of outcome 5.

    Data received from the survey will be statistically analyzed by department faculty with the name of alumni respondents kept confidential. Results will then be presented to the full department faculty and changes in the program discussed if weaknesses become apparent as a result of the survey data.

C. **General Education Assessment**

    Entirely apart from the political science undergraduate degree, the Department of Political

Science is also part of the university's general education program and thus responsible for part of the assessment of that program. The Department has chosen to conduct assessment of its courses in Area D3 of the general education curriculum, specifically the course PLSI 1, Introduction to Political Science, which we teach every semester. The course mainly deals with introducing students to comparative political science, international political systems, the distribution of power in the nation state system, authoritarianism, capitalism, socialism, fascism, federalism, and social democracy.

We have three learning outcomes in PLSI 1 and we assess one each year (but both semesters of that year). Assessment is done with a special written essay which requires students to critically analyze a political situation with the knowledge and tools they are being given in the course. The essay is then assessed with a rubric designed by the Department that captures both content and structure. The goal is for students to score in the "C+ / B-" range on the rubric because that shows a reasonable command of the material.

V. Student Learning Outcomes X Assessment Methods Matrix

Enter Assessment Methods Matrix/Table

Direct Measures:	Outcome 1 Concepts and Knowledge	Outcome 2 Concepts and Knowledge	Outcome 3 Tools	Outcome 4 Tools	Outcome 5 Development
Pre & Post Tests: Lower & Upper Division	X		X	X	
Student Paper Portfolios		X	X		
Policy Argument Memorandum		X			X
Indirect Measures:					
Alumni Survey					X

VI. Timeline for Implementation of Assessment Methods and Summary Evaluations

2009-2010 Academic Year

Paper Portfolio Analysis

Pre-Test / Post-Test

- Pre-tests will begin in PLSI 1 courses in the fall semester of 2009

Analysis and discussion of graduation and retention data in the spring semester of 2010

PLSI 1 papers collected for G.E. assessment

2010-2011 Academic Year

Alumni Survey

- Names and addresses will be collected in the fall semester of 2010
- Survey will be sent at the beginning of the spring semester of 2011
- Data will be analyzed over the summer of 2011
- Department assessment and discussion of program change will take place in the fall semester of 2011

Pre-Test / Post-Test

- Pre-tests will be given in all PLSI 1 classes
- Post-tests will be administered for the first time in the spring semester of 2011
- Data will be presented to the department for discussion in the fall semester of 2011

Paper portfolio analysis

Analysis and discussion of graduation and retention data in the spring semester of 2011

PLSI 1 papers collected for G.E. assessment

2011-2012 Academic Year

Pre-Test / Post-Test

- Pre-tests will be given in all PLSI 1 classes
- Post-tests will be administered in the spring semester of 2012
- Data will be presented to the department for discussion in the fall semester of 2012

Paper portfolio analysis

Analysis and discussion of graduation and retention data in the spring semester of 2013

PLSI 1 papers collected for G.E. assessment

2012-2013 Academic Year

Pre-Test / Post-Test

- Pre=tests will be given in all PLSI 1 classes
- Post-tests will be administered in the spring semester of 2013
- Data will be presented to the department for discussion at the end of the spring semester of 2013

Paper portfolio analysis

Policy argumentation memo analysis

Analysis and discussion of graduation and retention data in the spring semester of 2013

PLSI 1 papers collected for G.E. assessment

2013-2014 Academic Year

Pre-Test / Post-Test

- Pre-tests will be given in all PLSI 1 classes
- Post-tests will be administered in the spring semester of 2014
- Data will be presented to the department for discussion in the fall semester of 2014

Paper portfolio analysis

Policy argumentation memo analysis

Analysis and discussion of graduation and retention data in the spring semester of 2014

Alumni Survey

- Names and addresses will be collected in the fall semester of 2013
- Survey will be sent at the beginning of the spring semester of 2014
- Data will be analyzed over the summer of 2014
- Department assessment discussion of program change will take place in the fall semester of 2014

PLSI 1 papers collected for G.E. assessment

2014-2015 Academic Year

Program Review Year

VII. Closing the Loop - Summary Evaluation, Curriculum Adjustment, and Reporting

The Political Science Department has made adjustments to its SOAP based on the results of previous assessments and, consequently, has simplified some of the outcome measures in order to be able to assess students more effectively and in a more timely fashion. For instance, the Department in 2012-2013 eliminated an older direct assessment measure using embedded questions in exams because of serious logistical issues and because it was redundant with the pre / post-tests. In its place the Department added the assessment of the policy argumentation memos majors write in the required course Public Policy Analysis (PLSI 150). This is a very different form of writing from the research papers and one conducive to developing specialized skills majors will need in their professions, so we decided to add it. We did this because the Department has come to the conclusion that we have not done enough to sharpen the skills students will need to succeed in their professions after graduation. The analysis of these memos using the rubric will begin in the fall semester of 2014.

Once a year the Department faculty are provided all of the data from the year's assessments and we discuss what to do about revealed weaknesses. For instance, during the 2013-2014 academic year, the Department collected papers from students which the faculty assessed with its rubric. The results of this analysis showed us that there has been some improvement in student writing, though many still have trouble writing analytical papers because they have a hard time going beyond just repeating information they learned in class. The department is currently discussing new ways to further improve this aspect of student writing.

The Political Science Department will continue to assess students and plans to review the new data from the policy argumentation memos along with the paper portfolios and pre / post-test data in 2013-2014 AY to see if the changes we are making are starting to show results. This is part of a re-assessment the Department is doing of all of its course offerings and degree requirements because we are becoming a little concerned about students having all of the tools they need, in addition to conceptual knowledge, to gain employment soon after graduation.

Assessment and closing the loop in 2013-2014 AY

The best example of closing the loop is with our assessment report from 2013-2014 AY:

This report is organized around the four questions asked in the Department / Programs Annual Report Guidelines.

Question #1: What learning outcomes did you assess this year?

Preparing for our re-accreditation, we assessed all learning outcomes this year by doing four things. First, we conducted our annual pre-test / post-test measuring student knowledge relevant to the discipline of political science, a direct measure assessing learning outcomes 1, 3, and 4 in our SOAP. The second was the assessment of student writing ability in the discipline of political science, which is a direct measure of learning outcomes 2 and 3. Third was our assessment of student analytical ability by having them write public policy memos (this is a new direct measure this year) which assesses learning outcomes 2 and 5. Finally, we conducted a survey of alumni graduating from our department in the last five years, an indirect measure of learning outcome 5.

Question #2: What instruments did you use to assess them?

The knowledge of political science outcome measure is assessed with our pre-test / post-test. This is a quiz that asks six fundamental questions regarding knowledge that should be acquired as part of a political science degree. The quiz was developed by the political science department faculty in 2007, with a revision done in 2010.

The second outcome measure, writing ability, is assessed with the research paper writing rubric that the department developed in 2006 and has used consistently ever since.

The third assessment instrument was the rubric designed a couple of years ago by faculty to assess the writing of policy analysis memos in our public policy-making class (PLSI 150).

The fourth, the alumni survey, is the same survey we used five years ago. It was administered on-line.

Question #3: What did you discover from these data?

Pre-test / post-test knowledge assessment

As laid out in our SOAP, the knowledge measure is assessed with pre-test and post-test quizzes. The pre-test is always given in our introductory course, PLSI 1. We then administer the exact same quiz to all graduating seniors. The results presented here are the results of the post-test administered this year compared with pre-test from four years ago, which is more or less the time when these same students likely took PLSI 1. In 2009-10 the average pre-test grade was 3.73 on a scale of 1 to 6 (the highest possible average score is 6). This is the base-line against which we assess student knowledge when they graduate. The 2013-14 post-test average was 5.35, which is the highest post-test score we have ever had. Students are clearly acquiring knowledge relevant to the major. It is also worth noting that few students got the wrong answer on any of the post-test questions, indicating that there is no particular piece of knowledge that was systematically lacking.

Paper writing assessment

The writing rubric was used to assess a random sample of student papers kept on file in the political science department office. The papers are from core courses for the major that all students must take. Below are the specific items assessed with the rubric, the results for the sample of students on a scale of 1 to 5, and an indication as to whether this is an improvement over last year's average scores:

Measure on the rubric	Average	Change
Displays an understanding of the issues in the pertinent literature:	4.07	+
Quality of theoretical argument:	3.3	–
Clarity, originality, and conciseness of the theoretical argument:	3.5	0
Quality of organization:	3.45	+
Quality of writing:	3.30	–

Sources properly cited: 4.23   +

The scores for this year are almost identical to the scores from last year, so in all cases where plus are minuses are indicated, the differences from last year are minor. Overall writing remains a challenge, though the scores overall are higher than average. Having said that, in the first and last categories student average scores are in the top 4-5 category, so there is little room now for significant improvement. The middle four categories have scores in the 3-4 range showing that there is still room for improvement.

Policy analysis memorandum assessment

Students usually struggle with this kind of very concise writing assignment. They typically approach it like a thesis paper. The intent of the writing assignment is to have them identify a policy problem and its causes, develop criteria for developing solutions, and evaluate solutions against these objective criteria. This is a standard approach in the public policy field. After reviewing the Fall 2013 memos, we found that students have the most difficulty with the proper identification of a problem and separating the causes from the consequences. Many used data to illustrate the problem, but do not always use the most valid data to demonstrate a particular problem. We also found that students are struggling with the evaluation of solutions. This requires a higher level of analytical thinking, which some students are able to do, but perhaps a majority of the class cannot. The evaluation of these papers indicates to us that more time should be spent in class explaining how to analyze problems and evaluate the solutions. In terms of students' writing ability, sentence structure and word usage are problems. This detracts from the clarity of their points and logical flow of their arguments.

Alumni survey

In the spring semester of 2014 we surveyed alumni who had graduated from our bachelor's program in the last five years. We had responses from 41 students of the ### we were able to obtain email address from the alumni office. We analyzed the responses to a series of closed and open-ended survey questions and what we consider the most important findings are summarized here:

- 71% of our recent graduates are employed in full time jobs and 61% are pursuing a graduate degree
- The primary employers are federal and state governments, nonprofit organizations, K-12

education, and business
- Students reported gaining significant proficiency in skills like critical thinking, written communications, oral communications, and research, but not gaining proficiency in computer skills, teamwork, and leadership
- The above bullet point is a concern because all of these skills were reported as important to students in their jobs, including computer skills, teamwork, and leadership
- Of our core courses, all are considered by the students to be useful, especially American Government (PLSI 2) and Public Policy Research (PLSI 150), except for research methods (PLSI 90) which was not rated as especially useful
- While graduates reported that faculty were very knowledgeable, provided balanced viewpoints in the classroom, and were prepared, they also said that we were weak on both career advising and academic advising

Question #4: What changes did you make as a result of the findings?

Here are some of the modifications the Department is considering in response to the 2013-2014 assessment:

- Regarding advising, the criticism regarding advising is dated because we have changed our advising system (all full time faculty now do it, not just the chair) so most of these graduates were familiar with the old system, and we hope our new system will provide students with a better feeling of having been well advised
- The knowledge assessment from the pre-test / post-test showed strength in student learning, so no changes are necessary there
- The writing assessment showed tiny changes from last year, so we will continue to discuss how to improve student writing abilities
- The policy analysis memo assessment is new this year, so it will serve as a baseline for future assessment, though it appears that we need to work more on critically analyses problems and thinking of solutions, not just describing them
- The alumni survey also revealed that we are deficient in teaching computer skills and teamwork / leadership skills. Several faculty have also mentioned that we need to emphasize use of computer software like Excel in the classroom, so PLSI 90, a class many graduates felt was not so useful, is being changed to emphasize use of Excel. Dr. Holyoke also teaches the class by putting students into teams to work together to solve problems, so hopefully this will help increase student experiences in teamwork
- Based on the information from the alumni survey, the faculty have decided to have a top to bottom review of the department's curriculum for the bachelors degree in political science, including the core classes required of all students to make sure they conform to prevailing norms in the political science discipline and are providing the best knowledge and skills for our students.

Overall, the faculty in the Political Science department will continue improving the program student learning outcome assessment activities and initiate assessment of core competencies in areas of oral

and written communication, critical thinking, information literary and quantitative reasoning. This core competency assessment of core competencies can be infused with the existing SOAP as it evolves and develops, or as part of a university-wide evaluation process.