

## Part I. General Information

Program(s) Discussed: Political Science Major  
Current Semester: Spring 2015  
Date of Assessment Meeting(s): September 17, 2014; April 15, 2015 and May 13, 2015 (this was the meeting at which data were shared with Dept members)  
Participants in Assessment Meeting(s): All full time Dept members and some part-time

All Annual Assessment Reports are available to the appropriate Associate Dean, Dean, and the Provost, as well as to other administrators for institutional effectiveness and accreditation purposes. Please indicate the degree to which your program would like this information more widely shared.

### On-Campus Users

- Freely available  
 Available upon request  
 Unavailable

### Off-Campus Users

- Freely available  
 Available upon request  
 Unavailable

## Part II. Assessment Process

*Prompt:* In one or two paragraphs, describe your assessment process. Did you gather data on all of your program's student learning goals? If not, which student learning goals did you measure in this assessment cycle? What tools did you use to attempt to measure student learning? Where and how were they administered? Who scored them?

The Department of Political Science has 35 majors and 35 minors. We have several minors and several concentrations in our Department as well. In addition, we participate in cores old and new as well as many of the inter-disciplinary programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The type of participation ranges from course offerings to committee membership to lending our most precious resource, which is faculty time, to the administration of these programs. We also give significant time to University governance (e.g. faculty council and University committees) as well as faculty leave for administrative positions.

This year, we became much more explicit about our assessment process. We updated some of our goals and developed at least one direct and one indirect method of measuring our progress towards meeting our goals. In this report, we will focus on Program Learning Goal One which is *Students will demonstrate knowledge of the major fields of political science: American, Comparative, International Relations, Theory and Methods*. In the interest of a broader understanding of our assessment plan, we also attach our assessment plan to this report so that the reader can see the alignment of Department Program Learning Outcomes with both Institutional Academic Learning Goals and with Assessment Measures.

To measure this goal directly, we administered the Political Science Major Field Test (MFT) to all graduating Political Science majors. The test was administered Saturday April 25. Students took the MFT online through the ETS Porthole but it was proctored by Drs. Hahn and Peden. Students are

required to take this exam in order to graduate. It is a free-standing exam not associated with any course.

We have two indirect measures for Learning Goal One as well. First, we added a question to student evaluations in introductory courses and in the Method course asking students whether this course had increased their knowledge of the relevant sub-field of Political Science. The courses are introductions to the American (PO 101), Comparative (PO 102), IR (PO 103), Theory (PO 104) and Methods (PO 300) subfields. All student evaluations are administered to students via email. Students complete the evaluations in class (experience has shown that to leave the evaluation to students to complete outside of class results in only a 50% completion rate. By having them bring a computer or phone to class to complete the evaluation, we have achieved an 85% completion rate this year). The second indirect measure is an online exit interview administered to all graduating Political Science majors. This interview is completed by the students at the time that they take the MFT exam.

### **Part III. Findings**

*Prompt:* Along with this report, please submit the data charts the program used during the assessment meeting. Describe, in words, what your program learned about student learning during this assessment cycle. What were your strengths? In what ways did students fail to meet the goals you set for them?

We began with reviewing data from the MFT exam. 30 students took the exam, all of whom completed at least 50% of the exam. One student left in a half hour, the rest of the students were there for at least an hour taking this multiple choice exam. *Thus, we learned that students or almost all students seemed to take the exam reasonably seriously.*

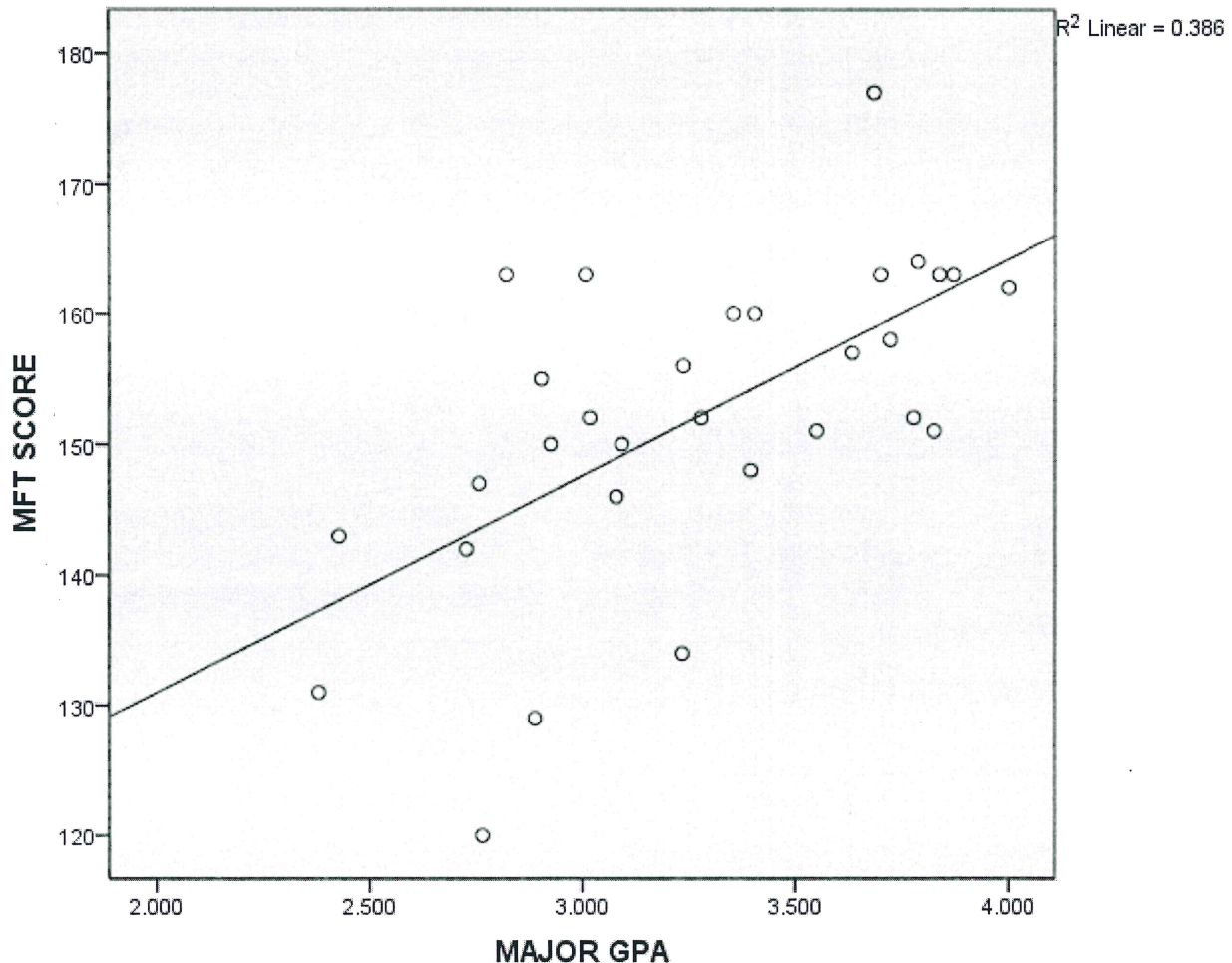
In terms of test results, student scores averaged at exactly the mean for the national test results. Not all colleges require this test. About 4000 students at 116 schools have taken this test between 2011 and 2014 and our students are being compared to those students. The overall mean for the test was 152 (compared to a national mean of 152.2). The JCU student sub-score for US Government and Politics was 53 compared to a national average of 52.3 (standard deviation (s.d.)= 12). The Comparative Politics JCU sub-score was 51 compared to a national mean of 52.4 (s.d.=13) and the International Relations sub-score was 51 compared to a national mean of 52.2 (s.d.=12). Our students' scores ranged widely from the bottom 3% to the top 3% nationally with a cluster around the mean.

In addition to the sub-score results, ETS also provides a Departmental Summary of Assessment Indicators on Analytical & Critical Thinking, Methodology and Political Thought. The mean percent correct for Analytical & Critical Thinking for JCU students was 61 compared to 59.3 nationally (s.d.=8.1). For Methodology, JCU students' mean was 49% correct compared to 44.9% nationally (s.d.=8.8) and for Political Thought, JCU students scored 53 compared to 53.1% nationally (s.d.=10.3). *Thus, we learned that JCU students scored at or slightly above the national mean on all of our direct assessment indicators.*

Assessing the relationship of overall GPA, major GPA, MFT score and MFT sub-scores helps us understand the relationships of these variables to one another and it allows us to assess criterion validity of GPA and MFT score. The question is whether this multiple choice test (MFT) is a valid measure of our students' knowledge about Political Science gained through a much more multi-method liberal arts education. *Our table of correlations (table 1) helps us to learn that all of these variables are related.* MFT score is highly correlated with GPA (.532\*\*) and Political Science GPA (.621\*\*) as we would expect if the MFT is a valid indicator of Political Science knowledge. *These findings reassure us about the validity of the MFT score.*

In addition, comparing the sub-score indicators shows that students who do well on the US sub-field tend to perform well on the Comparative (.591\*\*) and IR (.756\*\*) sub-fields as well. These findings address our students' concerns that they would not do as well on one of the sub-fields if they took most of their electives in one of the other sub-fields. Instead, *we learn that students who do well in one sub-field tend to do well on all of them.*

One last test for the important effect of major GPA on MFT score. We estimate a bivariate linear regression model to assess the effect of major GPA on MFT score. Results show (table 2) that there is a strong, statistically significant effect of major GPA on MFT score. The  $R^2$  measure of .386 shows that we can explain 38.6% of variation in MFT scores by major GPA alone which is a very strong measure. The constant of 97.8 means that a student with a 0.0 GPA is estimated to score 97.8 on the MFT exam. Then for every one full point increase in GPA the student's MFT scores is estimated to increase by 16.6. So a student with a 2.0 gpa is estimated to make  $97.8 + 16.6(2) = 131$ . A student with a 4.0 PO gpa should make  $97.8 + 16.6(4) = 164.2$ . The graph below illustrates this relationship. *Through examining the effect of major GPA on MFT score, we learn that major GPA is a strong and significant predictor of MFT score.*



Moving to the indirect indicators, we examined the results of the course evaluation questions pertaining to our assessment goal. The most significant result was that students overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed (89.5%) that the course they took had increased their knowledge of the subject that they had taken. 2.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 8.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. We are satisfied with these results given the wording of the question. A few students in the courses are majors, even seniors, who never got around to taking some introductory subfield course. Thus, they may not think they have increased their knowledge as much as students taking the Introductory course at the appropriate time would have since they already have a strong base of knowledge. *In general, however, we learned that most students believe they have increased their knowledge of the field in which they took the course.*

Finally, examining the senior exit interview, we find many statements from students that they believe they have developed knowledge of the major fields of Political Science. One student reports that the American Politics course “Lays the groundwork for understanding political science in general through the lens of American political history.” Another student writes that the Comparative course “continued to broaden (his or her) political knowledge through understanding other countries’ political systems.”

During the IR Introductory course the student learned “not only how IR affects international politics but different countries’ domestic politics as well.” In Political theory, a student reports that s/he was “exposed to a variety of political theories that are the basis for political behavior. Political thought helped [me] understand the motivation and value systems that support different governments and how they affect one another. I also learned how to think critically in examining the texts of this course and how to communicate my ideas effectively in group discussion of this course.” In the Methods course, a student reports that s/he “struggled but this class showed me how to properly research and communicate my findings, as well as understand how variables change the climate of politics.”

Another piece of evidence from the senior exit interview was that when asked what students wish they had had more instruction in or exposure to in their major, 4 of the 25 said more statistics, methods and research design (3 said more economics). *Thus, we learned through a different indirect measure that our majors think that they have knowledge of the major sub-fields of Political Science and that the most commonly expressed desire (though only 4 out of 25 students reported this) that they wanted more statistics and research methods.*

#### **Part IV. Planned Changes to the Assessment System**

*Prompt:* What changes, if any, do you need to make to your assessment system? (Questions to consider include: 1) Do your measures and processes provide useful data with a reasonable amount of effort? and 2) Are your measures reliable, valid, and sufficient?) On which student learning goals do you plan to focus your attention during the next assessment cycle? Do you need to implement additional formative assessment tools to better understand some of your findings? If so, describe those here.

We believe our MFT measures are valid as discussed above in the findings section. Students who score high in PO gpa also score high on the MFT. Additionally, ETS is not transparent in its testing in terms of validity and reliability. However, they have a professional product that has been tested for validity and reliability as discussed on their website. The student evaluation measures work as indirect measures. It is possible that students could think they are increasing their knowledge and reporting that in their evaluations and their senior exit interviews. However, when we couple those indirect measures with the close relationship that we see between major GPA and MFT score, we can be more confident that students are learning more about political science and political science subfields as a result of taking Political Science courses.

For next year's assessment work, we want to focus on goal two which is *Students will be able to demonstrate academic and intellectual skills: critical analysis; academic writing; and oral communication*. To do that, we need to implement measures in the classroom to assess these skills. We will also use course evaluations and will further analyze the analytic and critical thinking measurement available through the MFT.

For next year, we also need to develop a plan to assess our minors and concentrations.

### **Part V. Planned Changes to the Program in Response to Data**

*Prompt:* What changes, if any, do you need to make to your program in response to what you now know about student learning? (Possibilities include changes to learning goals, pedagogy, assignments in particular classes, activities, and curricular requirements and/or structure.) What is your anticipated timeline for both implementation and assessment of the planned changes?

Having recently updated our program goals for the Political Science major, we see no reason to change them at this time. Given the findings discussed above, our students are learning and believe they are learning about the major subfields that comprise Political Science. They are also demonstrating their learning on the MFT test. Further, the better their major GPA, the higher on average they perform on the MFT test.

In response to student concerns as expressed in the senior exit survey, we are planning to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the Learning Commons in the library. Our students expressed a concern that Methods was difficult yet they recognized the importance of them for their major and for their career. Thus, we would like to participate in Learning Commons using students who have excelled in Methods courses. They can also tutor students on other aspects of Political Science but the Methods component is crucial. We have also added a Methods course that is a prequel to the Methods course that has been giving some students difficulty. The purpose of that course is to provide a philosophical underpinning to and conceptual understanding of empirical methods. When the students finish that first course, they will then be ready to understand mathematically and apply statistically the methods that they already conceptually understand.

We hope to have students working in the Learning Commons this Fall and the prequel class is already underway.

#### ***Supporting documents to follow:***

1. Political Science Department Program Learning Outcomes with Alignment to Institutional Academic Learning Goals and Alignment with Assessment Measures
2. Major Field Test Departmental Summary of Total Test and Subscores
3. Table 1 Correlations of MFT score with GPA, Political Science GPA and MFT sub-scores and Table 2: Effect of Political Science GPA on MFT score
4. Relevant Excerpted Course Evaluation Results from sub-field courses