

Part I. General Information

Program(s) Discussed:	Political Science Major
Current Semester:	Summer/Fall 2016
Date of Assessment Meeting(s):	October 12, 2016 (this was the meeting at which data were shared with Dept. members. Other discussions took place as part of scheduled department meetings throughout the academic year 2015/6).
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	Off-Campus Users
X Freely available	X Freely available
0 Available upon request	0 Available upon request
0 Unavailable	0 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?

In accordance with the department's Assessment Plan, for this past year we focused on Goal II of the department's Learning Goals, which is as follows: ***Students will be able to demonstrate academic and intellectual skills: critical analysis; academic writing; and oral communication.*** (For details on the departmental Learning Goals and on how they align with JCU's Institutional Academic Learning Goals we refer back to last year's initial report). The MFT continued to provide data with respect to Goal I as well.

To assess these goals, we employed three measures: (1) the Political Science Major Field Test (MFT), which we have administered to all graduating political science majors for the past 20 years and which includes, in addition to the standard questions on substantive political science knowledge, several items on academic and intellectual/critical analysis skills; (2) the Political Science Dept. Rubric for Assessing Writing Assignments, which we developed specifically for this purpose; and (3) the Political Science Oral Presentation Rubric, likewise specifically created for this purpose by the department (see attached).

The MFT was administered online, at the end of April, in a session proctored by the assessment coordinator, to the entire PO graduating class through an interface provided by ETS. The assessment of writing took place, through the instructors, in three classes: PO 200 and PO 300 (both required classes and taken by majors only) as well as PO 337 (a class accessible to non-majors as well). PO 337 served a comparative purpose only. Oral presentation skills were assessed in PO 300 only.

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?

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the **2016 MFT** scores (mean/median), and subfield scores, are stronger, in some cases substantially stronger (i.e., **Analytical & Critical Thinking**; Methodology), than those from 2015, except for the subscore in comparative politics, which is unchanged. **Critical Thinking** is one of the areas specifically assessed in 2015-16, and the data suggests that it is one of our strengths. More detailed trend and comparative analysis is required to make sense of these results (see below).

Table 1 DEPARTMENTAL SUMMARY OF TOTAL MFT TESTSCORES, incl. SUBSCORES, 2016

	Mean/Median		Standard Deviation
	2016	(2015)	
Total Test Scaled Score	155/157	(151/153)	12
Subscore: American Govt	56	(52)	13
Subscore: Comparative	50	(50)	14
Subscore: Intern. Rel.	54	(50)	12

Assessment Indicator Number	Assessment Indicator Title	Mean Percent Correct '16 ('15)
1	Analytical & Critical Thinking	64 (59)
2	Methodology	59 (47)
3	Political Thought	54 (52)

Trends: (Table 2) By way of summary one could say that our MFT scores are pretty consistent: low to mid 150s for mean and median, respectively, and low 50s for the four main subfields. Scores for methodology and critical thinking are a bit more variable. The scores for 2013 were a bit lower than the long-term average, the scores for 2016 were higher (data for 2014 is missing. Due to a technical malfunction of the JCU computer system, the test could not be administered on the designated day).

Trend JCU MFAT 2006-16

Table 2

	2011	2012	2013	2015	2016
Mean	152	152	148	151	155
Median	154	154	148	153	157
US	50	52	47	52	56
Comp	51	51	53	50	50
IR	55	52	50	50	54
Meth	67	45	49	47	59
Pol Tht	51	55	47	52	54
Crit	68	58	56	59	64
N	42	29	32	32	24

Benchmarking (Table 3): One of the shortcomings of the MFT is that it does not automatically provide any reference points for the purpose of comparing one’s institution’s performance. Fortunately, a proxy measure can be created within the MFT reporting system. Using publicly available SAT data, I created three reference groups: (1) schools with incoming freshmen SAT scores similar to JCU’s; (2) schools with higher SAT scores than JCU’s; (3) schools with lower SAT scores than JCU’s.

Institutional Comparison 2011-16
(reference scores are from 2011-15 period)

Table 3

	JCU 11-15	JCU 16	"Similar"	"Higher"	"Lower"
Mean	150.8	155	155.6	160	152.9
Median	152.3	157	155	160.5	152
US	50.3	56	55.5	58.5	51.9
Comp	51.3	50	55.5	58.9	53.4
IR	51.8	54	55.5	59.6	52.7
Meth	52.0	59	47.5	56	46.9
Pol Tht	51.3	54	57.8	62.2	57.9
Crit An	60.3	64	63.7	68.6	61.3
N inst	1	1	11	10	10
N students	159	24	515	305	213

As Table 3 shows, our 2011-15 scores lag behind all three reference points to some degree, largely because a significantly poorer showing in 2013 dragged our average scores down (see Table 2 above). The only exception is the Methodology subsection, which outperformed two out of three the reference institution-sets during this time period.

The MFT scores for 2016 showed significant improvement across the board and nearly all of them are on par with, or stronger than, those of “similar” institutions. **Methodology and Critical Analysis** are clearly strengths for us. Only the subscore for **comparative politics** still lags behind that of peer institutions.

One should be careful not to make too much of individual scores. Instead one should look for patterns. The patterns observed in Tables 2 and 3 clearly show (1) improving performance by our students, and (2) performance which is, roughly, in line with expectations, based on comparisons to similar institutions.

Assessment of Writing:

The Rubric developed and employed by the department is appended to this report. It is based on similar rubrics that are used by other departments (e.g., HS) or that can be found at universities across the nation.

Table 4 - Assessment of Writing

Key: 0 = below expectations
1 = meets expectations
2 = exceeds expectations
% of students below exp.

Course	Instructor	RQ/Thesis	Organization	Evidence	Sentence Structure	Grammar	Sources	Average
PO 200	Dr. Ziemke	0.95 40%	1.35 10%	1.00 20%	1.25 10%	1.45 10%	1.05 20%	1.175
PO 300	Dr. Swear.	1.44 22%	1.44 11%	1.00 44%	1.11 33%	1.22 33%	1.11 22%	1.22
PO 337	Dr. Sobisch	1.22 0%	1.13 0%	0.5 50%	0.75 38%	0.88 38%	1.25 13%	0.96

The department's plan is to assess writing within the major at 3 distinct points within a student's 4 year passage through JCU: in PO 200 (usually taken during 2nd year), PO 300 (typically taken during junior year), and at the 400-level (each student is required to take at least one 400-level class before graduation). Other upper-division classes may serve to provide additional data points. It is hoped that a progression can be detected and documented, with students' reaching the highest point of writing proficiency in their 400-level classes. The scores from spring 2016 will serve as baselines for future assessment.

As can be seen in Table 4, while the average writing assessment scores during 2016 were at or above the level of "satisfactory" (i.e., 1.0 or higher), on average almost a quarter of students (23%), scored below expectations on the six categories of assessment across the three classes (but with little discernable pattern). More data, particularly at the 400 level classes, will have to be collected in future years to document learning through the cumulative process of multiple, writing intensive courses.

Assessment of Oral Communication:

The oral communication assessment rubric used by the department is an abbreviated version of the one developed by JCU's dept. of Communications. During the spring semester of 2016 the department assessed the oral communication skills of our political science majors in one class: PO 300.

Effective oral communication was assessed in ten separate categories, grouped into three areas: (1) Content/Substance; (2) Structure; (3) Delivery. The ratios of satisfactory scores to total N in each respective category were as follows:

Table 5 – Assessment of Oral Communication

Content/Substance

Saliency 9/9

Reasoning 7/9

Quality & use of evidence 6/9

Structure

Effective introduction 8/9

Effective conclusion 7/9

Effective limitation of ideas 8/9

Effective organization and development of ideas 7/9

Delivery

Vocal variety 8/9

Style 7/9

Facial Expression & eye contact 7/9

All of the unsatisfactory scores across the various categories were obtained by the same three students. Thus two-thirds (6/9) of the students performed consistently satisfactorily, and often even excellently, in all categories.

Since the total number of students assessed is small, more data will need to be collected to permit meaningful analysis.

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.

Our original plan was to cycle through our four departmental learning goals (LGs) by assessing one additional LG during each successive year, starting in 2014/15. Therefore, by spring 2018 each LG would have been assessed at least once, but most of them more than once, since the plan was to assess each goal every year, with adjustments made to the instruments on an ongoing basis, as needed.

Accordingly, in 2015/16 we assessed LG 2 (“Demonstrate academic and intellectual skills: critical analysis; academic writing; and oral communication”), while still continuing to assess LG 1. During the current year we are assessing LG 3 (“Be engaged in and aware of local, national and global politics”), while still assessing LGs 1 & 2.

Adjustments to this plan will be made on the basis of two factors: (1) experience (what works, what does not?), and (2) our upcoming program review, which may result in a modification of LGs.

It is too early in this cycle to have a clear sense of what measures need to be adjusted, but we have made two minor modifications nonetheless: (1) we have broadened the scope of the MFT analysis by including trend as well as comparative data (see Tables 2 and 3 above), and (2) we changed the classes in which we conduct writing assessment (the logic was explained above). In addition, for 2017 we will review, and add to, the senior exit interview questions in order to make this process more meaningful and helpful. Results will be reported in the next Assessment Report.

Last year’s report presented data on the validity of the MFT. The other measures are essentially subjective, but based on multiple sources (professors) such that, over time, inconsistencies in scoring should cancel each other out.

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?

Given how recently our formal LGs have been established, and how we are just in the third year of assessing our students’ substantive knowledge and in the second year with respect to intellectual skills, it is premature to propose major adjustments to our program. Preliminary findings and trends have yet to be confirmed. Nevertheless, our students have demonstrated superior performance, compared to reference institutions, in the subfield of **methodology**, and at least equal performance in the area of **critical thinking**, which are two of the academic and intellectual skills assessed last year. In addition, virtually all of our MFT scores are trending positively for the second year in a row, and are now roughly on par with, or even stronger than, those of reference institutions. These results tell us that our program is, at a minimum, effective in bringing our students to the expected level of proficiency.

In the area of **comparative politics**, which has been a relative weakness of the department, we will have, after eleven years of reduced capacity, once again two full-time faculty members available. This will double our ability to offer courses in that area and should contribute to an improvement of scores going forward.

In the area of **written and oral communication** the department’s discussion centered on the question of how we – as non-English or Communications teachers – could improve our students’ skills in those areas of written and oral communication where we lack specific professional expertise (e.g., English grammar,

or speech delivery) without compromising the substantive integrity of our courses. The areas of writing and oral communication that are specific to our discipline, e.g., evidence or documentation, can always be strengthened, if needed. Beyond those areas, rather than explicitly teaching our students “how to write or speak,” we will be providing them with a sufficient number of assignments (in most or even all of our classes), with guidance, with timely feedback on draft material, and, crucially, with the opportunity to correct mistakes before the end of the semester such that final products have, wherever possible, gone through a process of editing and revision. Setting high expectations, particularly for written materials, is equally important.

Supporting documents to follow:

1. Political Science writing assessment rubric
2. Political Science oral communication assessment rubric.

Department of Political Science
 John Carroll University
 Rubric for Assessment of Writing Assignments

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Falls Below Exections
Research Question (RQ) or Thesis	Very clear and organized; engaging, scholarly introduction.	Functional introduction and RQ/thesis statement, but one that lacks specificity and clarity of key terms of the thesis/RQ.	Poor or vague introduction; RQ/Thesis unclear and imprecise. No clear sense of purpose.
Organization	Clear, Logical, consistent structure; sophisticated transitions; ideas and themes fully developed in separate paragraphs; convincing conclusion.	Identifiable structure with discernible transitions; few if any logical problems; topic sentences need improvement; few "random" points; logical conclusion.	Absence of connections between RQ/thesis and paragraphs; few or excessively long (or short) paragraphs; serious logical problems; non-sequiturs within paragraphs; no conclusion.
Evidence	Claims are well-supported; sources integrated to clearly and effectively defend the thesis or answer the RQ; attention devoted to proper context of sources.	Inconsistent support for claims; sufficient examples and details to support a thesis or answer a RQ but some lack of evidence; acknowledges proper context of sources.	Claims not well supported; few if any details; conclusions based on generalization or prejudice; undue reliance on stacked quotes (stringing together of quotations with no connection or development provided by essay-writer); excessive quoting; ignores context.
Sentence Structure	Sentences have a clear subject and active verbs; skillful attention to sentence structure and word choice.	Occasional passive voice and unnecessary prepositional phrases; otherwise proper sentence structure; appropriate diction and avoidance of clichés.	Serious problems with sentence structure; incoherent sentences; inappropriate word choices/clichés.
Grammar	Proper use of grammar; very few errors that inhibit clarity; only minor errors in usage, punctuation, or spelling.	A few problems such as grammatical, mechanical, usage, punctuation, spelling errors, but not enough to significantly detract from the substance of the paper.	General misuse of grammar; frequent grammatical, mechanical, usage, punctuation & spelling errors. Difficulty communicating substance of paper.
Sources	Consistent attention to proper format for citation and proper use of sources; highest level of academic integrity.	Citations are not used properly or consistent. Insufficient attention to guidelines provided for citation and proper use of sources; no plagiarism.	Fails to cite sources. Lack of attention to guidelines provided for citation of sources; ANY EVIDENCE OF PLAGIARISM.

PO 300 Oral Presentation Rubric

Give one point for each E and subtract one for each U. TOTAL POSSIBLW SCORE = 10

Content/Substance	Expectation	U	S	E	Comments	+/-
Salience	Clearly reveals topic's importance and purpose				_____	
Reasoning	Logical inferences are clear and justified					
Quality & Use of Evidence/Support	Evidence is of high quality within the field and referenced accurately					
Structure	Expectation	U	S	E	Comments	+/-
Effective Introduction	Captures attention, previews points, focuses speech				_____	
Effective Conclusion	Summarizes points, signals end, leaves strong impression					
Effective Limitation of Ideas	Focuses on a few "best reasons," not tangential ideas					
Effective Organization and Development of Ideas	Provides clear claims, quality support, with reasons appropriate to audience					
Delivery	Expectation	U	S	E		
Vocal Variety	Changes in pitch, volume and rate keep speech interesting				_____	
Style	Speaker talks with audience, not at them; reads sparingly					
Facial Expressions & Eye Contact	maintains eye contact; scans					