



Date (Month/Year): August 2022

Assessment Contact: Ellen Carnaghan

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2021-2022

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2016

Is this program accredited by an external program/disciplinary/specialized accrediting organization?

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle? (Please list the full, complete learning outcome statements and not just numbers, e.g., Outcomes 1 and 2.)

Outcome 2: St 7d2 (t 7)h.55542.52 c 0 Tw 9(t)5 (tc)11.9-0 0 1J08.3 (e)-6 (a)-3.2 .004 Tc 0.004 Tw 0.891 0 Td[(h)-0.7 (i)-3

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please describe the artifacts in detail and identify the course(s) in which they were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

The department's assessment of the MA learning outcome above included 8 graduate seminars taught by POLS faculty in 2021-2022 (below), as well as MA field exams that students take at the beginning of their final semester in the program.

Unless otherwise indicated, courses were offered in person in Saint Louis.

POLS 5325 Public Sector Budgeting (S22, Cropf)

POLS 5500 Russian Political Culture (S22, Carnaghan)

POLS 5510 Democratization (F21, Carnaghan)

POLS 5630 The European Union: Politics and Political Economy (S22, Blanch, *Madrid*)

POLS 5664 International Political Economy in Times of Crisis (S22, Padilla, *Madrid*)

POLS 5690 Theories of World Politics (F21, Fisunoglu)

POLS 5930 Law and Religion (S22, Duncan)

POLS 6330 Public Finance Theory (F21, Cropf)

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and **include them in/with this report document** (please do not just refer to the assessment plan).

Department Assessment Coordinator Ellen Carnaghan organized the assessment process—devising the Qualtrics survey, reminding faculty throughout the year of the learning outcome being assessed, and generating the Qualtrics report. Instructors for selected graduate seminars responded to the questions listed below. Each course instructor decided how to measure whether or not a student had met the learning outcome expectations. Graduate Coordinator Matthew Nanes summarized faculty responses to each question and wrote the assessment report.

Instructors responded to the questions below on a Qualtrics survey:

Q2 - ii(t)4 (ri(-)-8 (d)2.3 (g)29. (f)9.6 ((n) ((-)-8 (e)4.9 (se)7.3.1en) (i)9.62 (n(-)-8.1se)7.3.1(n)5.9 (re)9 (riiq)2..9 (o)9.4 (en) (

- In some cases, students failed to complete intermediate assignments that involved writing a literature review, hampering opportunities to correct misunderstandings about what such a review should entail.
- Overall, our MA students are outstanding consumers of research in the sense that they consistently and effectively cite and summarize a relevant body of work, and place authors in conversation with one another. Where they struggle is in figuring out where to go from there, and how to generate knowledge based on their synthesis of existing work. One faculty member summarized this issue nicely, saying, “application comes easier to them than innovation.” This outcome is to be expected for students at the MA level, as innovation and knowledge production is a skill that most learn while completing a PhD. Outstanding MA students may learn to innovate effectively, and our program aspires to equip all MA students with the training and tools to do so, but the fact that most exhibit room for improvement in this regard is not surprising.
- We observed no perceptible difference in achievement of the learning outcome between St. Louis and Madrid. All St. Louis courses were taught face-to-face, so we cannot comment on differences across modality.

<i>Student is able to:</i>	Does not meet expectations	Meets (but does not exceed) expectations	Exceeds expectations	Outcome does not apply to this course
Identify relevant sources	STL: M: 1	STL: 12 M: 2	STL: 7 M: 5	STL: M: 4
Distinguish among competing theoretical explanations	STL: M: 1	STL: 12 M: 5	STL: 7 M: 6	STL: M:
Evaluate empirical evidence in support of theoretical explanations	STL: M: 1	STL: 9 M: 3	STL: 10 M: 4	STL: M: 4
Assess the persuasiveness of competing theoretical explanations	STL: M: 1	STL: 8 M: 2	STL: 8 M: 5	STL: 3 M: 4

Identify gaps in exist-0.0:

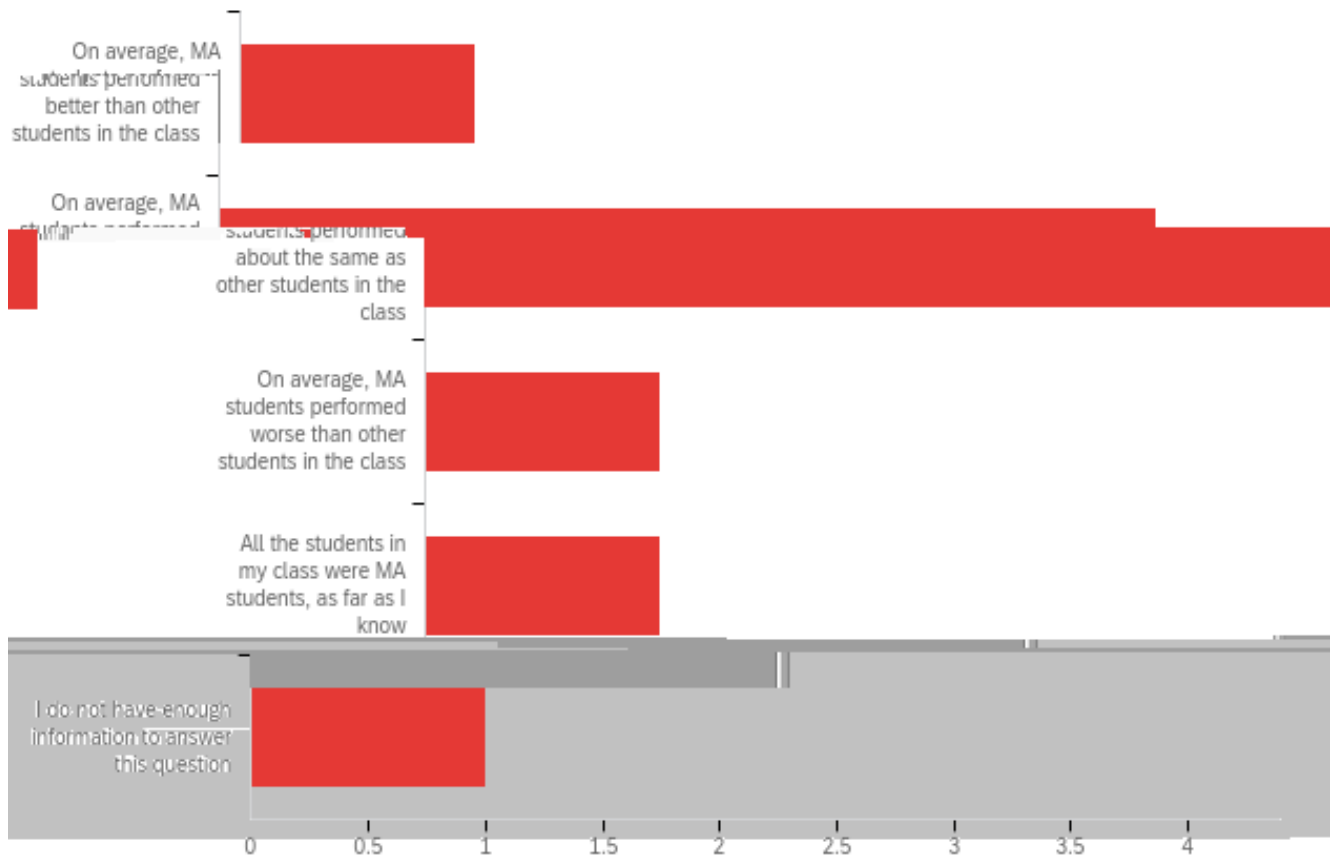
The weakest part was in presenting a persuasive argument using the theories to justify their choices. Both students did better on the written part (3 short policy memos) than on the Powerpoint presentation. Here, it was less the inability to critique competing theoretical explanations as it was their difficulty in applying the theoretical constructs to the data. However, this is difficult for many new Ph.D. students, too

Students were less adept at raising objections to competing theoretical claims or offering compelling counterarguments.

Identifying actual gaps in the literature and identifying the various versions of a theoretical approach by distinguishing nuances and fine details between various authors/scholars in one same theoretical approach was more difficult for the students.

Students struggled with more recent papers, especially when the paper was methodologically advanced. In topics that are inherently more deductive and require more abstract reasoning (such as Rational Choice or Nuclear Deterrence), they had a harder time understanding the major assumptions of the theories, so they often could not relax these assumptions and moved from the basic to more advanced discussions. Finally, they struggled to connect different levels of analysis and distinguish the impact of the international/structural and domestic/political dynamics when analyzing contemporary events.

Responses to "Q9 - How did MA students compare to students from other departments in terms of being able to critique competing theoretical explanations and produce a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature in their chosen field of study?"



Responses to "Q10 - What tactics were effective in enhancing students' ability to critique competing theoretical explanations and produce a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature in their chosen field of study?"

- As in the faculty comments about coursework, students struggled to convincingly critique bodies of literature by identifying holes, either theoretical or empirical. Instead, their reviews were generally limited to summarizing existing work and grouping pieces by theme or topic.

Faculty from the Madrid campus commented on the following (summarized by Nanes):

- Students were effective in “plac[ing] their analysis in the right scholarly context, and map[ing] out effectively the theoretical field.”
- “They were also able to bring in supporting evidence and articulate an argument based on both theoretical explanation and empirical soundness.”
- Some students struggled to identify gaps in existing literature. “We do need to work with them individually across many supervision sessions to help them see a potential area of contribution based on a critique of the literature. In that sense, ‘application’ comes easier to them than innovation.”

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

- Faculty discussed best practices for holding students accountable for turning in. For example, it is potentially easier to avoid turning in a paper than to avoid doing a presentation. Also, more one-on-one meetings along the way may help hold students accountable.
- Faculty acknowledge some challenges that stem from having undergrad, MA, and even PhD students in the same classroom, each with different sets of program-level learning outcomes.
 - Faculty agreed that the outcome goals are applicable to all levels, but perhaps with different expectations for levels of achievement. We will revise our assessment procedures to account for this difference in expected achievement levels.
- Finally, some faculty question whether a “comprehensive” review of literature is reasonable or appropriate in a single semester class.
 - In response, other faculty clarified that learning outcome relates to skills being developed in classes, not the actual production of a comprehensive literature review. That is, even if students do not have time to produce a fully comprehensive review in each course they take, they should be developing the skills needed to produce such a review in their area of study.
 - Analysis and critique of a body of literature comes in the context of the assignment. It is self-contained. Does not imply that students should do this for an entire field. “comprehensive” is context-dependent.

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Responses to "Q11 - What changes do you expect to make in this class the next time you teach it, if any, in order to ensure that students will be able to critique competing theoretical explanations and produce a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature in their chosen field of study?"

I plan to spend more time with just the MA students talking about the literature review.

In this class, the undergraduate students are not required to produce a comprehensive literature review, but the MA students are required to do so. It appears that the MA students needed more explicit instruction than I provided in this regard. In the future, I will plan to meet separately with the MA students to make sure that they better understand what a literature review is.

Increase the secondary literature required.

Assign a term paper rather than just the final exam for the MA students (Ph.D. students had to do both).

Have them work on integrating the written and presentation parts sooner maybe by having them submit a video presentation before the actual one in class. I would then use the video to assess their presentation strengths. Also, spend more time in class, on the theories (only 1 class was allocated to this last semester) and develop more examples of how they can be applied

- 1) The POLS assessment director responded to feedback from University assessment director Marissa Cope on our previous assessment by developing rubrics for faculty to fill out for every student. Faculty agreed to use the rubric and discuss what did or did not make sense for their classes. For the 2022 assessment, 8 instructors used the rubric.
- 2) Based on earlier assessments showing students needed more help with oral presentations, in Spring 2021, the POLS MA coordinator arranged an instructional workshop for faculty, presented by SLU Communications professor Tim Huffman. Some faculty have begun to employ what we learned.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

- 1) Discussion in our August retreat confirms that faculty approve of the rubrics used to evaluate each student.
- 2) Improvement in students' oral presentation will be assessed in future years after faculty implement techniques learned in our workshop on oral presentations.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

- For the 2020 assessment report, four of the six instructors reported that all POLS graduate students in their course met or exceeded expectation for both components of the learning outcome (designing research projects with appropriate methodologies and contributing to scholarly debates). Two instructors reported that 75-99 percent met expectations. No instructors reported any students who did not meet expectations.
- The outcome assessed for the 2021 assessment report included 5 components. In the 12 courses assess this year, instructors reported that at least 90% of students met or exceeded expectations for each component. Of this group, 50% or more exceeded expectations for each component. 2 students, or about 5%, did not meet expectations for two components. Four students, or about 10% did not meet expectations for three components.
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