

### Mission / Purpose

The mission of the M.A./M.S. programs in Political Science is to develop in our students advanced skills in research, critical analysis and writing, as well as detailed knowledge of government and politics, in order to prepare them either for advanced study or careers in government, social organizations, or business.

### Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

#### **SLO 1: Research Design**

Students will understand the basic building blocks of constructing a research design.

#### Related Measures:

##### **M 1: Exam**

Students will be evaluated based on their performance on the final exam in PS 611 (Research Methods).

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

#### Connected Document

- *Assessment Rubrics*

#### **Target:**

90% of students will achieve a 3 (competent) or better, on a 5 point scale, based on a rubric scoring understanding of research design demonstrated in their final course exam.

#### Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

8 of 9 students, or 89%, achieved a 3 or better. All students were on the Hattiesburg campus, this course was not offered on the Coast in 2011-2012 due to staffing issues.

#### Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

##### **Address problems in PS 611/612**

*Established in Cycle: 2009-2010*

The program recently upgraded its methods sequence to the 600 level, making these courses graduate only, and increasing the leve...

##### **Finalize rubrics**

*Established in Cycle: 2010-2011*

We need to finalize the development of rubrics for this measure and implement in PS 611 this Fall.

#### **M 2: Exit Survey**

Graduating students will be asked in an exit survey whether they understand the basic building blocks of research design.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

#### Connected Document

- *Exit Survey*

**Target:**

90% of students will, on an exit survey, agree that they understand the basic building blocks of research design (1-3 on a 7 point scale).

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of surveyed students (3) agreed that they understood how to construct a research design. 2 of the three strongly agreed. All students were in the Hattiesburg program. There were no graduates from the Coast in 2011-2012.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

**Add new items to exit survey**

*Established in Cycle: 2010-2011*

The exit survey has been rewritten to include a new item concerning understanding of the building blocks of research design. Th...

**SLO 2:Research Analysis**

Students will understand how to develop and test a research hypothesis.

**Related Measures:****M 3:Exam**

Students will be evaluated based on their performance on the final exam in PS 612 (Political Analysis).

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

**Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

**Target:**

90% of students will achieve a 3 (competent) or better, on a 5 point scale, based on a rubric scoring understanding of how to develop and test a research hypothesis.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met**

8 out of 10 students, or 80% of students, in PS 612 achieved a 3 or better on a rubric assessing student performance on a final exam. This falls short of our target of 90%. All students were on the Hattiesburg campus, this course was not offered on the Coast in 2011-2012 due to staffing issues.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

**Address problems in PS 611/612**

*Established in Cycle: 2009-2010*

The program recently upgraded its methods sequence to the 600 level, making these courses graduate only, and increasing the leve...

**Finalize rubrics**

*Established in Cycle: 2010-2011*

We need to fully develop rubrics for this measure and implement in PS 612 in the Spring 2012.

**PS 612**

*Established in Cycle: 2011-2012*

We have developed new rubrics and a new assessment plan for evaluating our program, though still tied to the central required co...

#### **M 4:Exit Survey**

Graduating students will be asked in an exit survey whether they understand how to develop and test a research hypothesis.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

#### **Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

#### **Target:**

90% of students will, on an exit survey, agree that they understand how to develop and test a research hypothesis (1-3 on a 7 point scale).

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of surveyed students (3) agreed that they understood how to develop and test a research hypothesis. 2 of the three strongly agreed. All students were in the Hattiesburg program. There were no graduates from the Coast in 2011-2012.

#### **SLO 3:Command of Literature**

Students will demonstrate an ability to find, use, and analyze scholarly sources.

#### **Related Measures:**

#### **M 5:Literature Review**

Students will be evaluated based on their thesis (MA) or final research project (MS).

Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

#### **Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

#### **Target:**

100% of students will achieve a 3 (competent) or better, on a 5 point scale, based on a rubric scoring the literature review portion of their thesis or final research project.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of students completing a thesis achieved a 3 or better (only one student completed a thesis after the rubrics were developed, but that student achieved a 5). The student completed and defended the thesis on the Hattiesburg campus. No students graduated from the program on the Coast in 2011-2012.

#### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

#### **Finalize rubrics**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

Finalize rubrics for this measure and implement Fall 2011 for MA students. Full implementation in Fall 2012 for all students.

#### **Follow through**

*Established in Cycle:* 2011-2012

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had two students compl...

### **M 6:Exit Survey**

Graduating students will be asked in an exit survey whether they feel competent to find, use, and analyze scholarly sources.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

#### **Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

#### **Target:**

90% of students will, on an exit survey, agree that they feel competent to find, use, and analyze scholarly sources (1-3 on a 7 point scale).

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of surveyed students (3) strongly agreed that they felt competent to find, use, and analyze scholarly sources. All students were in the Hattiesburg program. There were no graduates from the Coast in 2011-2012.

#### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

#### **Revise Exit Survey Item**

*Established in Cycle: 2010-2011*

Students were asked whether they are being required to use and analyze scholarly sources, not whether they feel competent to do ...

### **SLO 4:Subfield Knowledge**

Students will be able to read, understand, and critique scholarship in at least three subfield areas.

#### **Related Measures:**

### **M 7:Comprehensives**

Students will be scored on the portion of their comprehensive examination requiring an integrated knowledge of a subfield area, in each of three subfield examinations.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

#### **Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

#### **Target:**

100% of students will achieve a 3 (competent) or better, on a 5 point scale, based on a rubric scoring the portion of their comprehensive examination requiring an integrated knowledge of a subfield area, on each of three subfield examinations.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of students achieved a 3 or better on each subfield exam. These students completed and defended the thesis on the Hattiesburg campus. No students graduated from the program on the Coast in 2011-2012.

#### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

#### **Finalize rubrics**

*Established in Cycle: 2010-2011*

We need to fully develop a rubric for this measure. This will be implemented for all comprehensive exams beginning Fall 2011.

### **Follow through**

*Established in Cycle:* 2011-2012

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had three studen...

### **M 8:Exit Survey**

Graduating students will be asked in an exit survey whether they feel competent to read, understand, and critique scholarship in their major and minor areas.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

### **Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

#### **Target:**

90% of students will, on an exit survey, agree that they feel competent to read, understand, and critique scholarship in their major and minor areas (1-3 on a 7 point scale).

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of surveyed students (3) agreed that they felt competent to read, understand, and critique scholarship in their major and minor areas. 2 of the three strongly agreed. All students were in the Hattiesburg program. There were no graduates from the Coast in 2011-2012.

#### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

### **Add new items to exit survey**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

An item needs to be added to the exit survey for this measure. It will be included in subsequent exit surveys, beginning Fall 2...

### **SLO 5:Oral Communication (MA only)**

Students in the MA track will be able to effectively and clearly communicate, in an oral setting, key concepts and theories in their major area.

### **Related Measures:**

#### **M 9:Thesis Defense**

Students will be scored on their subfield-specific oral communication skills in the context of their thesis defense.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

### **Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

#### **Target:**

100% of students will achieve a 3 (competent) or better, on a 5 point scale, based on a rubric scoring their subfield-specific oral communication skills.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100% of students defending a thesis achieved a 3 or better on a rubric scoring their communication skills. (Again the number of students is 1, but the student achieved a 5). The

student completed and defended the thesis on the Hattiesburg campus. No students graduated from the program on the Coast in 2011-2012.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

**Follow through**

*Established in Cycle:* 2011-2012

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had two students...

**M 10:Exit Survey**

Graduating students will be asked in an exit survey whether they feel competent to give a lecture to undergraduates in their major area.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

**Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

**Target:**

80% of students will indicate on an exit survey that they feel competent to give a lecture to undergraduates in their major area.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Due to our attempt to preserve anonymity, it was not possible to administer this question only to MA students (in future we could include this as a question on the survey, but at the risk of identifying individual respondents). However, 100% of surveyed students (3) agreed that they competent to give a lecture to undergraduates in their major area. 2 of the three strongly agreed. All students were in the Hattiesburg program. There were no graduates from the Coast in 2011-2012.

**Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)**

**Address problems in PS 611/612**

The program recently upgraded its methods sequence to the 600 level, making these courses graduate only, and increasing the level of difficulty. Many students have responded well, but some students have struggled as a result. The action plan developed by the department responds to this difficulty in four ways: (1) students do better on papers when they are compelled to turn in graded rough drafts. We will build this in to both 611 and 612. (2) Given the intended difficulty of the courses a target of 100% B or better is unreasonable. We will set the target at 80%. (3) We will implement a writing workshop in 611 and 612 before the midpoint of each course. (4) We will assign, as a mandatory reading in each course, Lisa A. Baglione, *Writing A Research Paper in Political Science*. We will evaluate these changes for one year. At that point, if there is no improvement, we will consider requiring PS 311 for obviously underprepared students, as a precondition to 611 and 612.

**Established in Cycle:** 2009-2010

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exam | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Analysis | Research Design

**Add new items to exit survey**

An item needs to be added to the exit survey for this measure. It will be included in subsequent exit surveys, beginning Fall 2011.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011  
**Implementation Status:** Finished  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exit Survey | **Outcome/Objective:** Subfield Knowledge

**Implementation Description:** Add item to exit survey for Fall 2011.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

**Add new items to exit survey**

The exit survey has been rewritten to include a new item concerning understanding of the building blocks of research design. This new survey will be administered to graduating students in Fall 2011.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011  
**Implementation Status:** Finished  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exit Survey | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Design

**Implementation Description:** To be implemented at the end of the Fall semester 2011.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

**Finalize rubrics**

Finalize rubrics for this measure and implement Fall 2011 for MA students. Full implementation in Fall 2012 for all students.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011  
**Implementation Status:** Finished  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Literature Review | **Outcome/Objective:** Command of Literature

**Implementation Description:** Develop and apply rubrics for theses defended from Fall 2011, and all final research projects from Fall 2012.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

**Finalize rubrics**

We need to finalize the development of rubrics for this measure and implement in PS 611 this Fall.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011  
**Implementation Status:** Finished  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exam | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Design

**Implementation Description:** Design and use in PS 611 in the Fall 2011

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman Allan McBride

**Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

### **Finalize rubrics**

We need to fully develop a rubric for this measure. This will be implemented for all comprehensive exams beginning Fall 2011.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Comprehensives | **Outcome/Objective:** Subfield Knowledge

**Implementation Description:** Develop and utilize rubric for comps exams from Fall 2011.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

### **Finalize rubrics**

We need to fully develop rubrics for this measure and implement in PS 612 in the Spring 2012.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exam | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Analysis

**Implementation Description:** Develop rubric and implement Spring 2012.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman Troy Gibson

**Connected Document**

- *Assessment Rubrics*

### **Revise Exit Survey Item**

Students were asked whether they are being required to use and analyze scholarly sources, not whether they feel competent to do so. This has been revised to reflect the new measure and will be implement in the Fall 2011.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exit Survey | **Outcome/Objective:** Command of Literature

**Implementation Description:** Revise Exit Survey and administer Fall 2011.

**Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

### **Follow through**

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had three students complete comprehensive exams, but only two after the rubric was developed. The action plan



would therefore be to ensure that the rubric is applied to all students completing a thesis in 2012-2013.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012  
**Implementation Status:** Planned  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Comprehensives | **Outcome/Objective:** Subfield Knowledge

**Implementation Description:** Apply rubric to all comprehensive exams in summer, fall, and spring 2012-2013. Rubric is applied to each subfield area by the faculty member writing and evaluating the exam for that area.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Follow through**

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had two students complete a thesis, but only one after the rubric was developed. The action plan would therefore to ensure that the rubric is applied to all students completing a thesis in 2012-2013.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012  
**Implementation Status:** Planned  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Thesis Defense | **Outcome/Objective:** Oral Communication (MA only)

**Implementation Description:** Assess thesis defense for all students completing a thesis, summer, fall and spring 2012-2013.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**Follow through**

Rubric for this item was developed in the fall 2011. In the academic year (summer 2011 to spring 2012) we had two students complete a thesis, but only one after the rubric was developed. The action plan would therefore to ensure that the rubric is applied to all students completing a thesis in 2012-2013. In addition, the final project requirement for the MS track was only added to the curriculum as of January 2012. We have had no students complete a final project at this time.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012  
**Implementation Status:** Planned  
**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Literature Review | **Outcome/Objective:** Command of Literature

**Implementation Description:** In summer, fall, and spring rubric will be applied to all literature review portions of the thesis or final project by chair of the committee.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Marek Steedman

**PS 612**

We have developed new rubrics and a new assessment plan for evaluating our program, though still tied to the central required courses, PS 611 and PS 612. In the past we have had considerable difficulty determining what we want these courses to achieve, how to assess them appropriately, and meeting our chosen targets. We have made substantial progress in all three areas, determining the competencies we hoped students would achieve, assessing those competencies with a rubric applied to final exams, and meeting our target in PS 611. In PS 612 we have fallen short, but the problems are narrower. We have a small set of students, one or two, depending

on the semester, who are not acquiring the skills we think necessary to succeed in the program. The program is evaluating a combination of three approaches: closer scrutiny of applications to the program to assess whether candidates have the background to succeed in a graduate level statistics/research methods course; midterm review of performance with follow-up peer-facilitated study sessions; requirement of PS 311 for students who do not pass PS 612 (or 611), or for those who meet criteria for admission to the program but may benefit from PS 311.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

**Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Exam | **Outcome/Objective:** Research Analysis

**Implementation Description:** To be implemented in the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Troy Gibson

### Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

#### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?**

Last cycle we implemented a new assessment plan. The measures at that time were either partially met, met with data that didn't quite match the assessment tool, or unreported. This year, by contrast, we have met all but one of our targets, and came close on the one we missed. This suggests that we have a properly developed assessment tool for future years: one able to indicate both what we are doing well, and the areas where we need to improve. Exit surveys were generally very strong, and we seem to have given our students a clear confidence that they could themselves take on the role of teacher and scholar. Results in comprehensive exams and thesis defenses also indicate that overall the program is producing graduates with the knowledge and competence to teach and conduct independent research in political science, and the communication skills (written and oral) necessary to pursue careers in government, business, or the non-profit sector.

#### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?**

We have had problems with student performance in PS 611 and PS 612 since their inception as required methods courses for all students. In part this is by design: they are intended to both prepare students for graduate work in the discipline, but also to set a bar the program feels all students should be able to attain. We are pleased to have met our target in PS 611, but PS 612 fell short. This class requires continued attention as detailed in the action plan associated with the findings related to the course.

### Annual Report Section Responses

#### **Program Summary**

The program successfully developed and implemented a new assessment plan, along with a new set of rubrics for the new measures. Findings are generally positive, but must be taken in the context of a relatively small cohort of students completing. In fact, on the Coast, we have had no data at all this year, due to staffing problems in offering PS 611 and PS 612 and the happenstance that no students graduated on the Coast this academic year. This should change, however, as we have recently hired a full-time, tenure-track, faculty member on the Coast campus. In addition, the Coast is committed to offering the necessary core courses to students completing the program on the Coast in future years. On the Hattiesburg campus, we continue to fall short of our target in PS 612, but we are getting closer to identifying the competencies we hope to see the course deliver, as well as getting closer to meeting our target. Details on how to meet that target are offered in the associated action plan. We have also recently altered our MS track to require a written component. This is a valuable addition, we feel, encouraging students in this track to develop a journal-article length publication. At this time we have not had students complete this task, and so it remains to be assessed. But we should have a larger number of graduates in both MA and MS tracks in 2012-2013.

### **Continuous Improvement Initiatives**

In terms of continuous improvement we would note (1) the moves to strengthen the program as offered on the coast; (2) our action plan in relation to PS 612 and continuing efforts to improve student performance in core methods courses; (3) implementation of the written product now required of all MS track students.

### **Closing the Loop**

Last year we embarked on an effort to revamp our assessment plan to bring it into closer alignment with the current structure of the program, and its goals. A new battery of measures were developed in relation to new outcomes. Rubrics were drawn up for the objective measures and applied to comprehensive exams, theses, theses defenses, and exams in PS 611 and PS 612. New items were added to the Exit Survey for graduates of the program. While the findings must be considered tentative at this time, given the newness of the measures, the small number of graduates this year, and so on, we are generally pleased with the results. We believe that the actions completed this year provide a solid basis for assessment in future years, and narrow the focus of our improvement efforts on PS 612.