

Department of Politics: Undergraduate Program
Student Learning Assessment Rubric
Senior Comprehensive Exam

Trait	Level		
	Exceeds Expectations: (Honors Pass) (3pts)	Meets Expectations: (Pass) (2pts)	Below Expectations: (Fail) (1pt)
1) Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive, thoughtful response to exam questions. • Provides relevant insights into the subject matter as well as relevant insights beyond that which is asked for in exam questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear response to exam questions. • Provide sufficient insight into the subject matter related to exam questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear or meandering answer to exam questions. • Lacks sufficient insight into subject matter related to exam questions.
2) Knowledge of Concepts and Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates deep, broad, and detailed knowledge of the relevant literature. • Effectively uses relevant literature in a detailed and thoughtful manner when answering exam questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates general knowledge of the relevant literature and deeper knowledge of some areas of the literature. • Uses general knowledge of literature when answering exam questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not demonstrate basic knowledge of the relevant literature. • Does not use relevant literature frequently or correctly when answering exam questions.
3) Clear, Effective Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly and systematically answers all portions of exam questions. • Writing style strictly conforms to political science and academic norms. • Writes with grammatical precision and stylistic verve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers all portions of exam questions in a generally organized manner. • Writing style generally conforms to political science and academic norms. • Writes with adequate grammar and style. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not answer all portions of exam questions completely, correctly, or in an organized manner. • Writing style does not sufficiently conform to political science and academic norms. • Writes with poor grammar and style.

Annual Key Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements

Department of Politics: Undergraduate Program

Key Assessment Findings

Senior comprehensive exam: Introduction

The comprehensive exam in Politics is required of all seniors in the major. The comprehensive is a two-day exam, taken on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week (three hours each day). The first day is a multiple choice exam covering material from the three introductory courses required of all majors (Introduction to American Politics, Introduction to Comparative Politics, and Introduction to Political Theory). The second day consists of a series of essay questions, drawn from the elective courses offered in the department. Students must answer two questions related to topics in their sub-concentration (American, World, or Theory), and a third question on a topic outside of their sub-concentration. Students who fail the exam in the Fall semester may retake the exam in the Spring semester. Students who take the Senior Honors Thesis course (which requires writing a major research paper of 60 pages in length) are exempt from the second day of the exam.

Senior comprehensive exam: Rubric

The multiple choice portion of the exam (Day One) is graded through an automatic scanning method. The questions test a range of intellectual levels (as defined by Bloom's Taxonomy) but fall primarily into the categories of knowledge and comprehension. Students who receive a score of 90% or above on the multiple choice exam are given Pass with Honors (3 points); those with a score between 60% and 89%, Pass (2 points); those below 60%, Fail (1 point).

The essay question portion of the exam (Day Two) is graded by members of the faculty. The faculty member who authors a question grades all answers to that question. Essays are graded based on three categories: critical thinking and analytical skills, knowledge of relevant literature and key concepts in the field, and clear and effective writing. Each rubric is graded on the following 3 point scale: exceeds expectations (Pass with Honors), 3 points; meets expectations (Pass), 2 points; and below expectations (Fail), 1 point. The exam is also given an overall grade of Pass with Honors, Pass, or Fail (and a corresponding score of 3, 2 or 1). If an essay is judged to be a "borderline" case between these three categories, they may be given a grade of High Pass (2.5) or Low Pass (1.5). Essays which receive a Pass with Honors or a Fail are reviewed by a second faculty member and, in the event of a disagreement over the grade, are sent to a third reader for evaluation. The majority's evaluation of any disputed essay question constitutes the grade for that question.

The points for all three essays and the multiple choice exam are combined for a final score. Students with a combined score between 10 and 12 (or who receive three or more individual grades of Pass with Honors) are given a grade of Pass with Honors; those with a combined score less than 10 but greater than 6 are given a grade of Pass; students with a combined score of 6 or below (or who receive three or more individual grades of Fail) receive a grade of Fail.

Senior comprehensive exam: Key Assessment Findings

In the fall semester of 2009, 88 seniors took the senior comprehensive exam (including five Senior Honors Thesis students, who took only Day One of the exam). For Day One of the exam, the average performance score on the three-point scale was 1.95 (standard deviation 0.30).¹ Two students earned a Pass With Honors on the exam, six earned a Fail, and the remaining 80 earned a Pass.

Compared to the previous year's Day One exam, the results showed a very modest increase in average scores. (In 2008, the average performance score on the three-point scale was 1.94, with a standard deviation of 0.31; 89 seniors took the Day One exam that year).

Of the 83 seniors who took Day Two of the exam, the average score for critical thinking skills was 1.90 (standard deviation 0.62); for knowledge of literature and concepts, 1.82 (standard deviation 0.64); and for clear and effective writing, 1.91 (standard deviation 0.63).

Senior Comprehensive Exam, Fall 2009 Summary of Results

Trait	Day One		Day Two	
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1) Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills	n/a	n/a	1.90	0.62
2) Knowledge of Concepts and Literature	1.95	0.30	1.82	0.64
3) Clear, Effective Writing	n/a	n/a	1.91	0.63

¹ The mean raw percentage score of the Day One exam was 71.7% (median 70.5%), with a standard deviation of 8.9.