

Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Politics
Undergraduate Program

Assessment Measures

The Department of Politics utilizes the following measures to assess departmental learning outcomes:

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data
Capstone projects: senior papers and honors theses
Grades, course evaluations, and enrollment totals for gateway introductory
Courses in the Politics Major
Anecdotal Information through student feedback

Assessment Findings

NSSE National Survey Data

2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data (see Appendix 1) indicates that the Politics Department has several strengths that the department must continue to emphasize and develop. The Department of Politics is above the mean for Carnegie Peer institutions in the following categories: reading and writing assignments; developing clear writing and speaking skills; and “enriching educational experiences” through internships, study abroad, and classroom activities among majors. The NSSE data indicate that the Department of Politics is above the mean for Carnegie Peer institutions in the number of assigned textbooks and books.(See Appendix 1). Catholic University’s Department of Politics also is also above the mean for Carnegie Peer institutions in its requirements for written papers of 20 pages or more (See Appendix 1). The Department of Politics is above the mean for Carnegie Peer institutions in the assignment of papers or reports of 5-19 pages (See Appendix 1). More importantly, the NSSE data indicates that the Department of Politics is above the mean of Carnegie Peer Institutions in the development of clear and effective writing skills (See Appendix 1). Similarly, the Department of Politics is above the mean for Carnegie Peer institutions in the development of clear and effective speaking skills (See Appendix 1). The department’s faculty will continue to emphasize the assignment of a broad array of reading materials, the development of writing skills through the assignment of multiple papers, and the continuation of oral reports and class discussion to refine speaking skills among our students. These will be points of emphases in our discussions.

Areas of Improvement

Analytical Skills:

Despite the significant departmental strengths in developing effective writing and speaking skills among Politics majors, the NSSE data indicates that Politics seniors are slightly below the mean for Carnegie Peers in developing analytical skills (See Appendix 1). To help foster improved student performance in “analyzing” and “thinking critically” about political science, the Department of Politics has revised and strengthened the requirements for the “Senior Paper” that all Politics Majors must complete (see Appendix 3 of this report). The most significant revision in the senior paper requirement is the addition of a new two page section in all papers titled: “Interpretation and Analysis of the Literature and Findings.” This section will require students to succinctly summarize different interpretations concerning the subject that they are investigating, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence and arguments presented in the literature, and to offer their own independent analysis of how their own research and findings stand relative to the literature.

More Attention to Non-Majors

A second area identified by the Department of Politics as needing improvement, is the overall performance of freshmen in the Politics 111, Introduction to American Government course. Course grade and enrollment data for the required gateway courses in Politics (Politics 111, 112, and 211) indicate that course grades improve as Politics Majors progress in the program. However, there is reason to believe that performance can be enhanced in the Politics 111 course by creating a separate Introductory course for non-majors. Course data from 2003 to 2007 indicates that 74% of students in Politics 111 earned grades between B- and A while 9% of students receive grades of D, F, or W (Withdrawal) [see appendix 4]. In Politics 112 (Introduction to Comparative Politics), 82% of students earn grades of B- to A and only 5% receive grades of D, F, or W [see appendix 5]. The figures are comparable for Politics 211, Introduction to Political Theory [see appendix 6]. Part of the disparity in good grades in Politics 111 relative to Politics 112 and Politics 211 appears to be based on the fact that significantly more non-majors enroll in Politics 111 than in Politics 112 and 211.

As a result of this data, the Department of Politics is considering offering a separate section of Politics 111 for non-majors. Adding a course for non-majors will likely provide two benefits. First, it will lower the class size for Politics 111 from an average of 55 students (in four sections) to an average of 45 students (in five sections). Lower class size will facilitate more class discussion and closer supervision of coursework and paper assignments. Second, by having a class of non-majors, presumably students will feel less unsure of themselves in participating in class discussions among other non-majors. Combined with closer faculty supervision, non-majors will presumably feel more comfortable learning about American government and politics.

Experiential Learning: A Continuing Strength

The Politics Department at Catholic University provides outstanding internship opportunities for CUA students in Washington, D.C., London, Dublin, and Brussels. The internship program has received well-earned praise from our graduates. In the National Survey of Student Engagement section on “Enriching Educational Experiences” 48.5% of Catholic University Seniors cite enriching educational experiences through internships, community service, and senior capstone courses as providing opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge and complement learning opportunities that enhance academic programs. This compares to 39.8% of students citing enriching educational experiences at Carnegie Peer institutions. The NSSE data indicate that field experience, internships, and Study Abroad, as well as senior projects or theses, are part of this category. There is no question that the significant advantage that Catholic University holds over Carnegie Peers and the NSSE aggregate data is from the central role of the Politics Internship and Study Abroad programs. This is another area of emphases in departmental outcomes assessments. The goal is to keep and strengthen the internship and study abroad opportunities for Politics Majors.

The Senior Comprehensive Examination

The final measure of achievement for the Department of Politics is the administration of the Senior Comprehensive examination. This examination uses an essay examination to test students on their major subfield of study in Politics: American, Theory or World, as well as a multiple choice examination to test their basic knowledge over the entire field of political science. The examination results [see Appendix 2] are evaluated by the entire department to identify areas of weakness among Seniors so that we may strengthen our course coverage in these areas. As can be seen in Appendix 2, the department has gone from a 93.67% pass rate in academic year 2002-2003 to a 100% pass rate in academic year 2006-2007. The overall pass rate over the five year period from AY 2002-2003 to AY 2006-2007 is 96.87% thus indicating that Politics Department faculty have been quite successful in training Politics Majors to have solid substantive knowledge in the field of political science.

Appendix 1

Standard 12: General Education : The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

2007 National Survey of Student Engagement Mean Comparisons: Selected Catholic University General Education Goals Department of Politics: Seniors

Graduates will demonstrate proficiency in oral and written communication, including the argumentative essays, research papers, presentations, and creative and collaborative work employing a variety of media.	Department of Politics	Department of Mechanical Engineering compared with:								
		Catholic University			Carnegie Peers			NSSE 2007		
		Mean ^a	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b
<i>During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done? 1=none, 2=1-4, 3=5-10, 4=11-20, 5=more than 20</i>										
Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	4.19	3.35	***	.80	3.08	***	1.13	3.13	***	1.06
Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	2.43	2.24	.00	.20	2.17	.00	.27	2.17	.00	.26
Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	1.94	1.73	.00	.29	1.59	*	.47	1.62	*	.42
Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	3.40	2.99	.00	.40	2.49	***	.97	2.55	***	.90
Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	3.41	3.20	.00	.18	2.93	.00	.41	2.96	.00	.39
<i>To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Writing clearly and effectively	3.46	3.04	*	.48	3.03	**	.50	3.06	*	.46
Speaking clearly and effectively	3.16	2.94	.00	.25	2.92	.00	.26	2.95	.00	.23

Graduates will show facility in critical thinking and reasoned analysis.	Department of Politics	Department of Mechanical Engineering compared with:								
		Catholic University			Carnegie Peers			NSSE 2007		
		Mean ^a	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b
<i>During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	2.70	2.66	.00	.04	2.78	.00	-.08	2.75	.00	-.05
Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	3.13	3.36	.00	-.33	3.22	.00	-.13	3.23	.00	-.13
Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	2.97	3.20	.00	-.27	3.01	.00	-.04	3.03	.00	-.07
Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	2.85	3.11	*	-.30	2.94	.00	-.10	2.96	.00	-.13
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	2.77	3.33	***	-.70	3.18	***	-.50	3.18	***	-.50
<i>In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often</i>										
Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	2.62	2.97	**	-.40	2.91	**	-.36	2.90	**	-.35
<i>To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Thinking critically and analytically	3.22	3.33	.00	-.15	3.32	.00	-.13	3.33	.00	-.14
Analyzing quantitative problems	2.52	2.70	.00	-.19	3.05	***	-.61	3.04	***	-.58
Learning effectively on your own	2.96	2.97	.00	-.01	2.99	.00	-.03	3.00	.00	-.05
Solving complex real-world problems	2.51	2.53	.00	-.02	2.75	.00	-.25	2.74	.00	-.24

Department of Mechanical Engineering compared with:

Graduates will demonstrate an understanding of scientific and quantitative reasoning.	Department of Politics	Catholic University			Carnegie Peers			NSSE 2007		
	Mean ^a	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c
<i>To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Thinking critically and analytically	3.22	3.33	.00	-.15	3.32	.00	-.13	3.33	.00	-.14
Analyzing quantitative problems	2.52	2.70	.00	-.19	3.05	***	-.61	3.04	***	-.58

Department of Mechanical Engineering compared with:

Graduates will demonstrate an ability to find information effectively using appropriate resources and technologies, critically assess the validity and relevance of information, and utilize it in ethical and legal ways.	Department of Politics	Catholic University			Carnegie Peers			NSSE 2007		
	Mean ^a	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c
<i>In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often</i>										
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	3.26	3.41	.00	-.21	3.26	.00	-.01	3.29	.00	-.05
Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	2.69	2.70	.00	-.01	2.74	.00	-.06	2.80	.00	-.12
<i>During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	2.85	3.11	*	-.30	2.94	.00	-.10	2.96	.00	-.13
<i>To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Learning effectively on your own	2.96	2.97	.00	-.01	2.99	.00	-.03	3.00	.00	-.05

Department of Mechanical Engineering compared with:

Graduates will demonstrate knowledge of and respect for different cultures and religions.	Department of Politics	Catholic University			Carnegie Peers			NSSE 2007		
	Mean ^a	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c	Mean ^a	Sig ^b	Effect Size ^c
<i>In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often</i>										
Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	2.69	2.70	.00	-.01	2.74	.00	-.06	2.80	.00	-.12
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	2.43	2.70	.00	-.26	2.68	*	-.25	2.66	.00	-.23
Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	3.11	2.88	.00	.25	2.71	***	.42	2.71	***	.42
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often</i>										
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	2.76	2.85	.00	-.10	2.81	.00	-.06	2.82	.00	-.07
<i>To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	1.95	1.97	.00	-.02	2.41	**	-.47	2.44	***	-.50
<i>To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much</i>										
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	2.19	2.20	.00	-.01	2.54	*	-.36	2.59	**	-.41

Appendix 2

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Institutional Assessment

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION RESULTS
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES: DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS
AY2002-2003 to AY2006-2007

	Fail		Pass		High Pass		Pass w/Honors		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
AY2002-2003	5	6.33%	72	91.14%		0.00%	2	2.53%	79
AY2003-2004	3	6.00%	47	94.00%		0.00%		0.00%	50
AY2004-2005	1	2.17%	28	60.87%	13	28.26%	4	8.70%	46
AY2005-2006	1	1.16%	81	94.19%	3	3.49%	1	1.16%	86
AY2006-2007		0.00%	59	100.00%		0.00%		0.00%	59
TOTAL	10	3.13%	287	89.69%	16	5.00%	7	2.19%	320

Note: Students were included in the categories High Pass and Pass with Honors if these designations were explicitly indicated within the student's milestone record. Please contact the Office of Institutional Assessment if this data can also be determined through the student's final grade in the comprehensive requirement.

Appendix 3

Senior Paper Requirement

The Senior Paper requirement will be communicated by Letter to each Politics Major during the second semester of their Junior year.

Formal Requirements include:

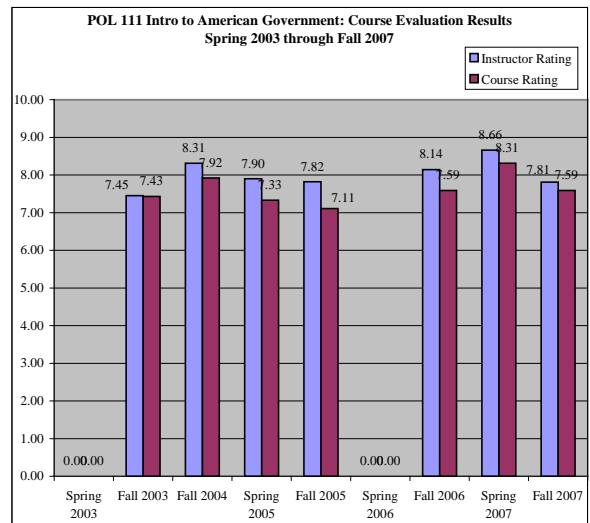
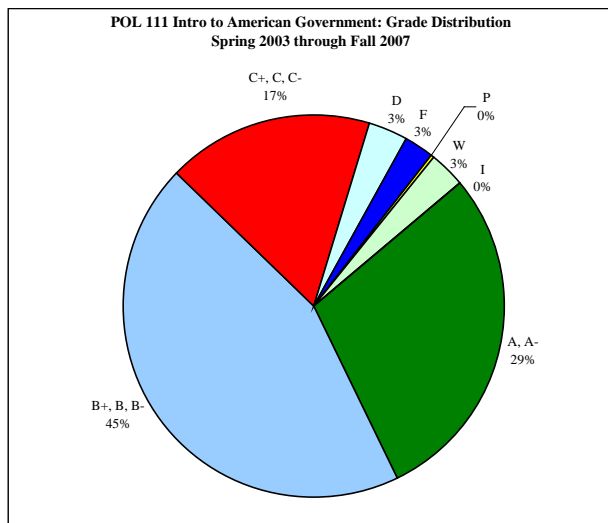
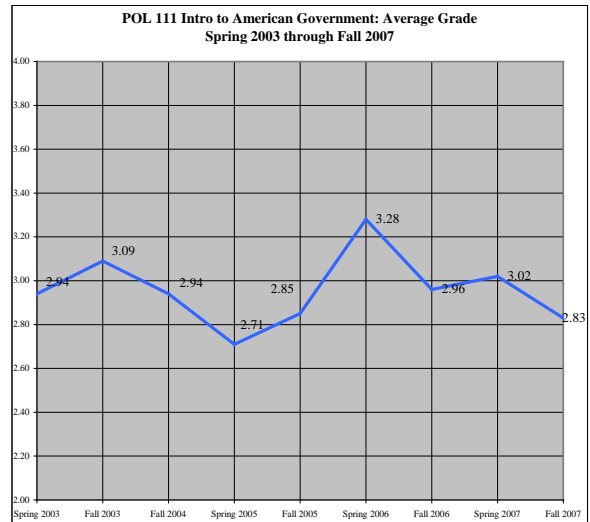
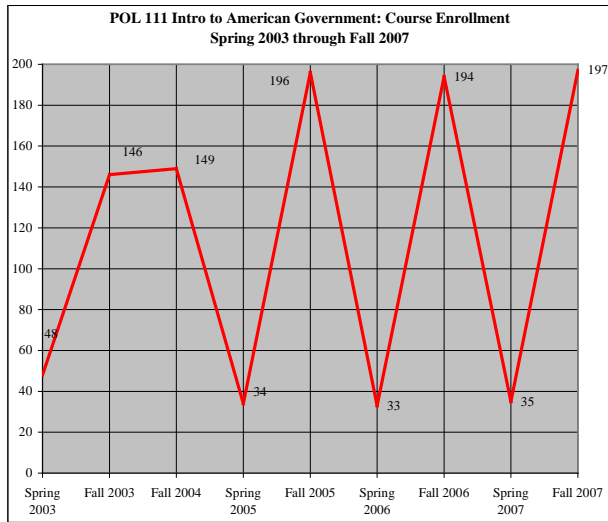
1. A formal one page proposal and outline listing likely sources. The Proposal will be due before Senior Comps in the fall, and require the signature of a faculty supervisor.
2. Senior papers must be a minimum of 20 pages of text, excluding notes.
3. Students must cite a minimum of ten sources (each cited within the paper, not just in the bibliography)
4. All Senior Papers must now have a two page section on “Interpretation and Analysis of Evidence” in which the student is required to assess the different interpretations regarding the subject, and the pros and cons of different interpretations. This section should be similar to an academic book review that weighs the strengths and weaknesses of an author’s thesis. The student should show the ability to synthesize the findings of others and provide independent analysis of research findings.
5. The due date for Senior Papers will be moved to the week after spring break to allow time for revisions.
6. Faculty will review Senior Papers for revisions and corrections by the end of March
- g. Seniors must submit the final, polished paper, with revisions and corrections by April 15 for faculty signature.

Appendix 4

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Institutional Assessment

COURSE SUMMARY DATA: DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS POL 111 Intro to American Government*

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades								Course Evaluation Results						
		Avg.	StDev.	A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	P	W	I	Course Eval. #	%	Instructor Rating Avg.	StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	StDev.	
Spring 2003	48	2.94	0.77	14	21	13								0.00%				
Summer 2003	2	3.65	0.49	1	1									0.00%				
Fall 2003	146	3.09	0.83	48	72	15		5			6		67	45.89%	7.45	1.96	7.43	1.92
Fall 2004	149	2.94	0.89	44	65	27	6	3			4		108	72.48%	8.31	1.63	7.92	1.77
Spring 2005	34	2.71	1.03	7	14	10		2			1		21	61.76%	7.90	2.07	7.33	2.01
Fall 2005	196	2.85	1.07	72	70	29	13	10			2		131	66.84%	7.82	1.73	7.11	2.06
Spring 2006	33	3.28	0.57	13	15	4					1			0.00%				
Fall 2006	194	2.96	0.82	46	94	36	3	4	1		9	1	103	53.09%	8.14	1.73	7.59	1.81
Spring 2007	35	3.02	0.84	13	12	8	1				1		32	91.43%	8.66	1.64	8.31	1.89
Fall 2007	197	2.83	0.89	41	96	37	12	4			7		141	71.57%	7.81	1.96	7.59	2.00



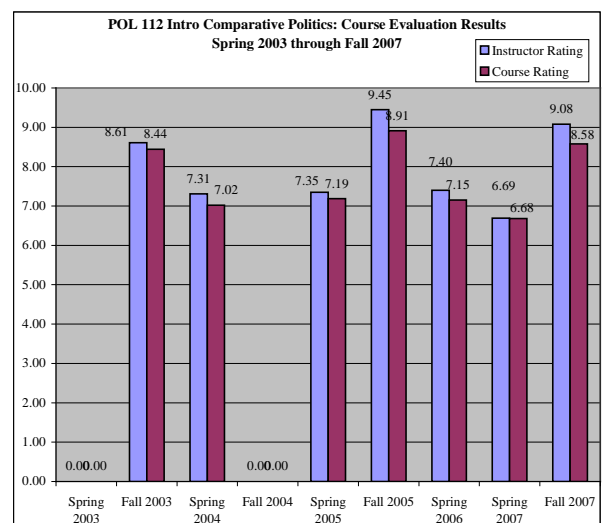
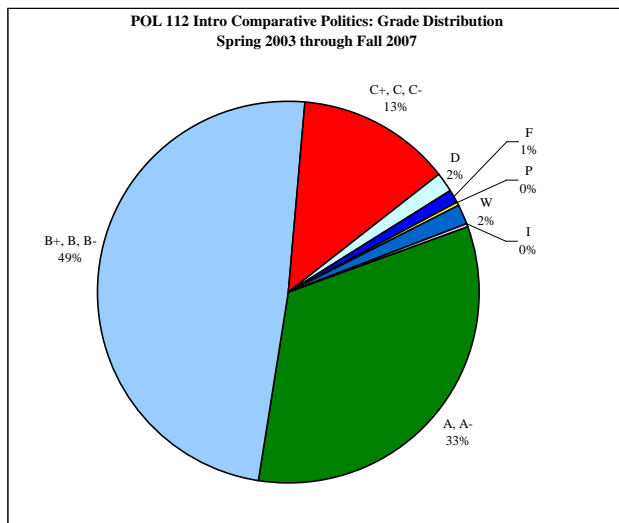
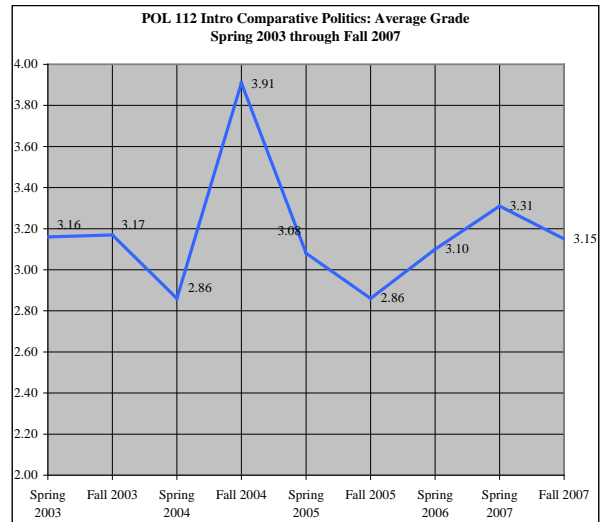
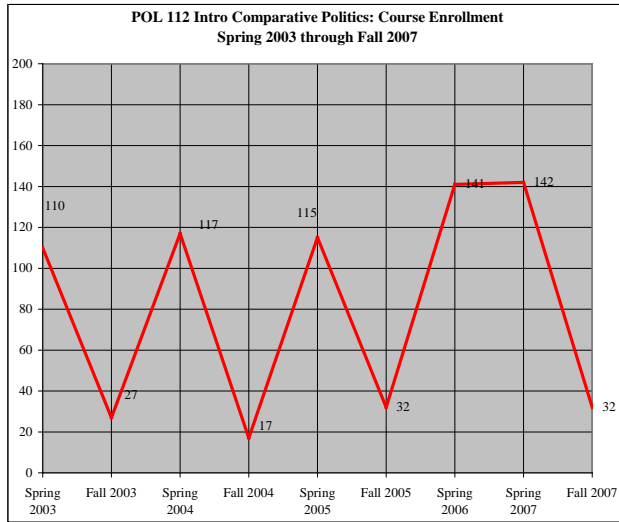
*Note: Graphs do not include summer enrollment or grade data.

Appendix 5

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Institutional Assessment

COURSE SUMMARY DATA: DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS POL 112 Intro Comparative Politics*

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades								Course Evaluation Results							
		Avg.	StDev.	A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	P	W	I	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.		
Spring 2003	110	3.16	0.72	40	47	17	3					3							
Summer 2003	6	3.48	0.45	3	2									0.00%					
Fall 2003	27	3.17	0.57	9	13	4						1		18	66.67%	8.61	1.20	8.44	1.15
Spring 2004	117	2.86	0.83	28	55	28	4	2						51	43.59%	7.31	2.30	7.02	2.24
Fall 2004	17	3.91	0.20	16	1										0.00%				
Spring 2005	115	3.08	0.64	27	73	12	2	1						57	49.57%	7.35	2.13	7.19	2.14
Summer 2005	4	3.68	0.29	3	1										0.00%				
Fall 2005	32	2.86	0.90	11	7	10	1		2		1			11	34.38%	9.45	1.04	8.91	1.14
Spring 2006	141	3.10	0.66	39	76	17	2	1			6			89	63.12%	7.40	2.03	7.15	1.90
Summer 2006	6	3.07	0.43	1	5										0.00%				
Spring 2007	142	3.31	0.66	61	71	7		2			1			78	54.93%	6.69	2.67	6.68	2.48
Fall 2007	32	3.15	0.97	12	15	1		2				2		24	75.00%	9.08	1.14	8.58	1.56



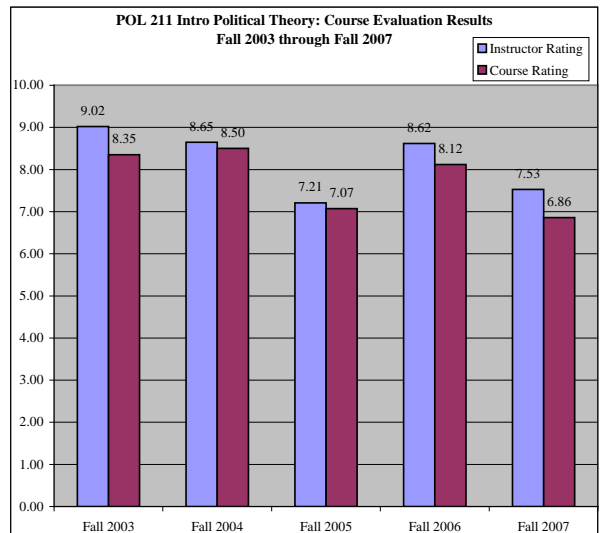
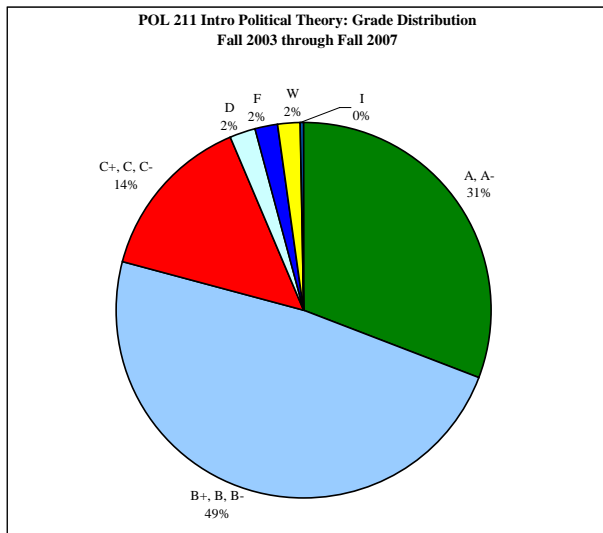
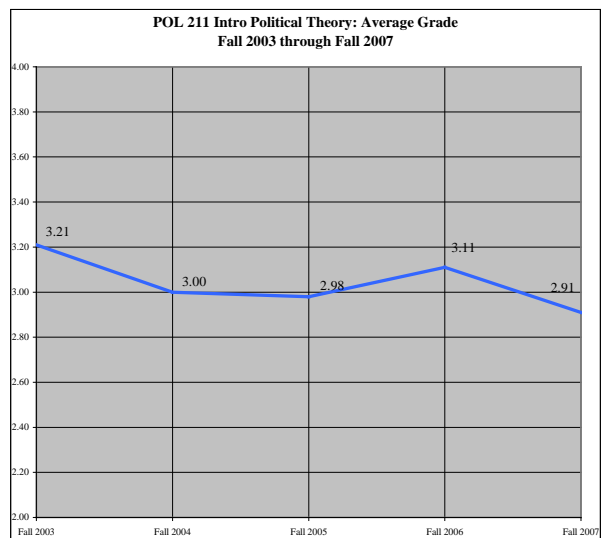
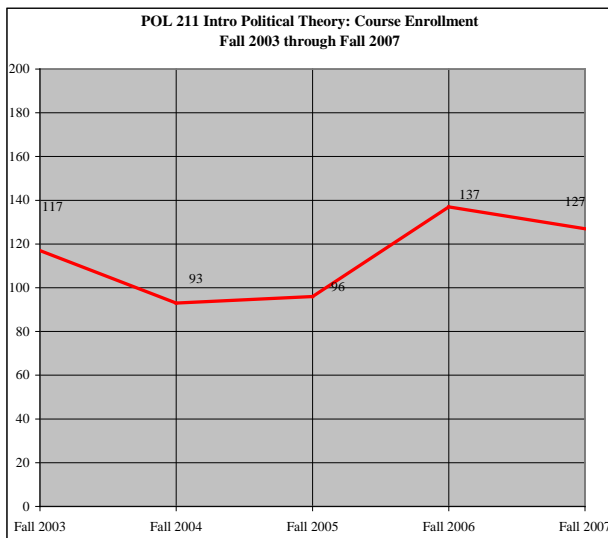
*Note: Graphs do not include summer enrollment or grade data.

Appendix 6

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Institutional Assessment

**COURSE SUMMARY DATA: DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS
POL 211 Intro Political Theory***

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades Grade Distribution							Course Evaluation Results						
		Avg.	StDev.	A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	W	I	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.	
Summer 2003	7	3.77	0.37	6	1								0.00%				
Fall 2003	117	3.21	0.77	42	57	10	2	2	4			84	71.79%	9.02	1.34	8.35	1.93
Summer 2004	5	3.60	0.44	3	2								0.00%				
Fall 2004	93	3.00	0.97	33	39	13	4	3	1			62	66.67%	8.65	2.02	8.50	1.82
Fall 2005	96	2.98	0.84	28	45	17	4	1	1			29	30.21%	7.21	2.54	7.07	2.37
Summer 2006	4	3.33	0.29	1	3								0.00%				
Fall 2006	137	3.11	0.83	50	57	19	3	2	4	2		92	67.15%	8.62	1.93	8.12	2.11
Summer 2007	12	3.28	1.14	8	2								0.00%				
Fall 2007	127	2.91	0.71	22	78	23		3	1			95	74.80%	7.53	1.85	6.86	1.96



*Note: Graphs do not include summer enrollment or grade data.