

Assessment Report for Academic Year 2014-15

Department of Political Science, TCNJ

Assessment Liaison: Brian Potter, potter@tcnj.edu

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The Department used a survey of seniors majoring in political science to perform two assessments in academic year 2013-2014. First, the Department measured student summary evaluations of political science courses and their subjective assessments of their ability to perform a number of field-specific tasks (listed in Appendix I: Political Science Learning Goals). These subjective measures are indirect assessments which correspond with the Department's learning outcomes. They have been asked in two consecutive academic years and provide the "core" battery of questions which will allow the Department to make over-time comparisons this year and in future years. Current results were satisfactory and relatively unchanged from previous years. Second, the Department also evaluated the effectiveness of POL 200: Political Analysis, the Department's quantitative methodology and research design course. Most students reported that POL 200 led them to feel efficacious in using statistical methods and the class helped to understand better Political Science scholarship.

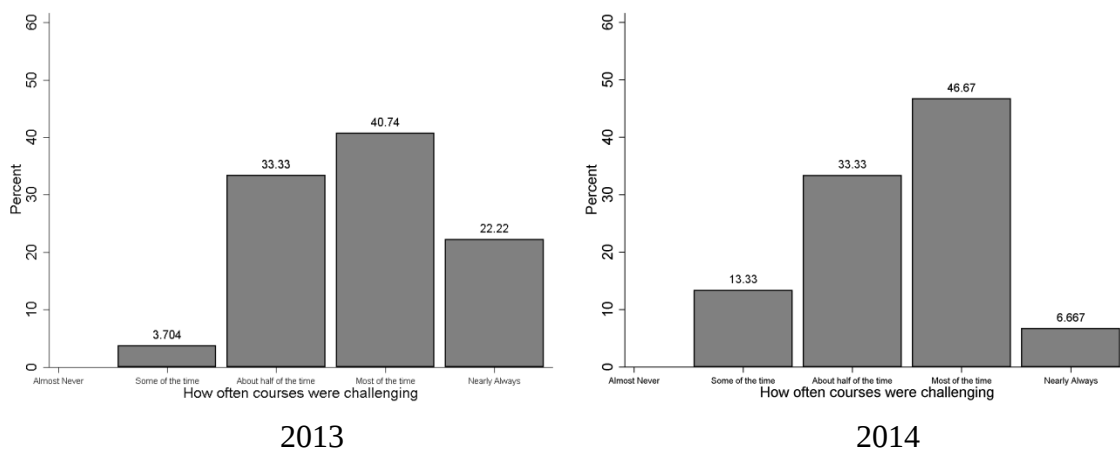
Last year, a Departmental committee designed and distributed to all Political Science seniors registered in the capstone seminars for the year a custom Qualtrics survey. Dr. Bowen designed and emailed the survey link using class rosters; instructors followed-up with a reminders to their students to respond. The survey was conducted in Spring 2014 with repeated questions from the previous year's survey and added questions on the quality of introductory classes and the effectiveness of the Department's methods training.

Although the Department's Assessment Plan envisioned that this year student learning objectives were to be measured by a panel of faculty members assessing senior theses, the Department instead continued with the survey approach. Due to retirement, sick leave and sabbatical release, the Department found itself too short-staffed to implement the planned assessment method.

Comparing learning outcomes across two senior classes

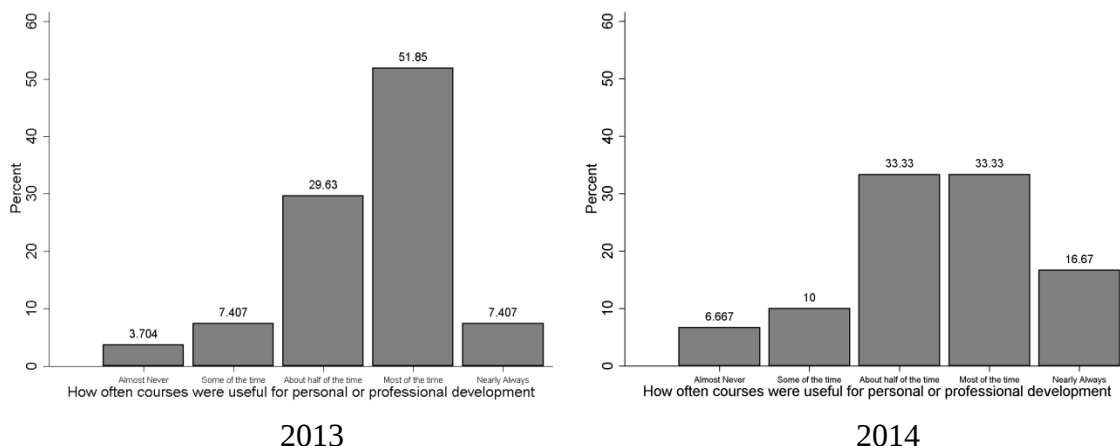
Data on Political Science learning outcomes are based on student satisfaction with the Political Science courses and students' self-reporting of academic and career skills gained. A comparison between years of senior satisfaction across all of the Political Science courses taken during their time at TCNJ shows little change. Looking at the sum of respondents who answered "Most of the time" and "Nearly always," some students reported that current courses were less challenging and less useful for personal and professional development than the previous cohort reported a year ago. Shown in figures one (2013 data) and two (2014) data below, roughly 63 percent of students considered their courses challenging in 2013 while only 54 percent did do in 2014. As shown in the appendix however, this is not a statistically significant change..

Figures one and two: Comparing challenge of courses over two years



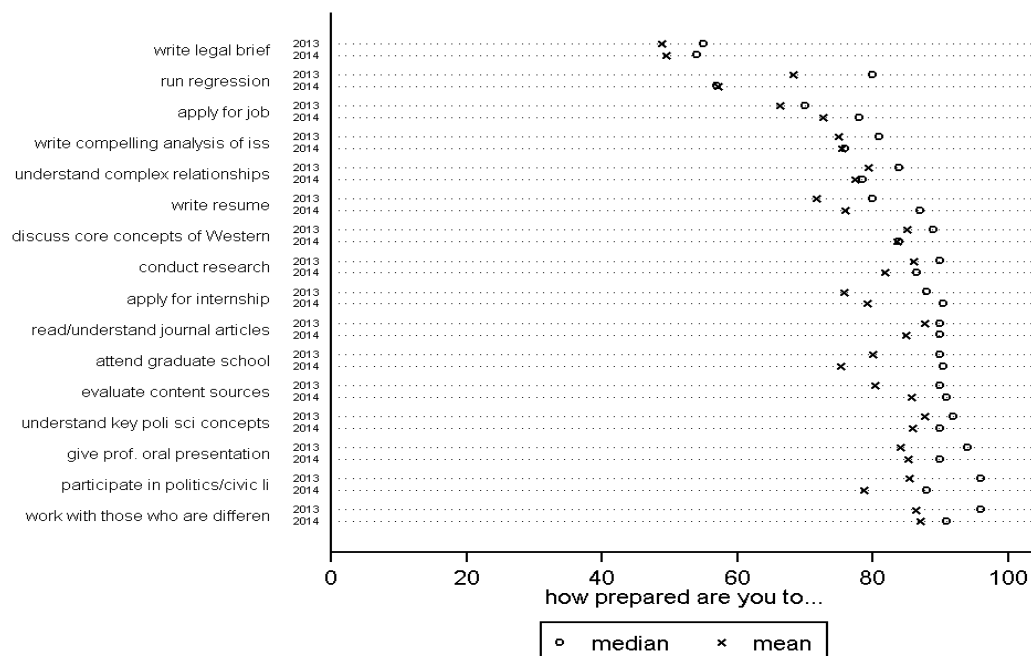
Measured by the sum of the same two categories, student reporting of the usefulness of classes for personal and professional development also dropped by about nine percent. Figures three and four show the distributions of responses to this question over the two years. On the other hand, more seniors surveyed in 2014 reported that their courses were stimulating and helpful for explaining current events, compared to the 2013 cohort. Answers to a fifth question, “How often were courses informative about key concepts in Political Science,” remained unchanged.

Figures three and four: Courses contribution to personal and professional development.



A comparison across the two years of student preparedness for various tasks, displayed in figure five, shows improvement in students being able to apply for a job, write a resume, and apply for internships. As the Department has been targeting job preparation as an area for improvement, this is comforting, even though the small change and sample size render the result statistically insignificant.

Figure five: Student preparedness for various tasks (2013 and 2014).



Scores on most other student assessment of their own skills remain unchanged. One exception is the score for “participating in politics and civic life,” which fell by about five percent (and may not be statistically significant given that there were only 26 respondents in the 2013-2014 survey).

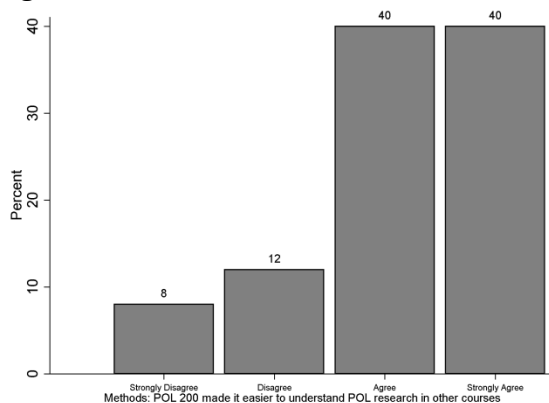
Taken together, the two comparisons above indicate that seniors were less satisfied with two criteria of their recent classes yet indicated no change in the skill that they have acquired over the last four years. The first set of results shown, satisfaction with courses, probably reflects more of a short-term assessment by students than the second measure, what students have gained over the last four years. Without bigger samples and more senior cohorts interviewed, it is difficult to know what any year-to-year variation means. We will know a great deal more about the standard assessment of course satisfaction and skill assessment as future senior cohort surveys are added to the time series.

Methodology Training

In recent years, the Department has made concerted efforts to increase the rigor and sophistication of its methodology training. Beginning in 2010, the Department now trains all political science majors in the use of Stata, a popular statistical software package, in Dr. Bowen’s POL 200 Political Analysis course (required course in the political science major). One of the objectives of this training is to facilitate undergraduate research (Departmental Learning Outcome #5: Original Research). Other professors are using more reading material with statistical content in class and have been encouraging students to use quantitative methods in their research projects. The Department had not, however, assessed the incorporation of methodological skills into courses other than POL 200, nor had it assessed the use of those skills throughout students’ college careers.

In the 2013-2014 Political Science senior survey, the Department asked several questions regarding POL 200 and the Department's methodology training. First, students were asked to assess how well

Figures six: usefulness of POL 200 for other classes



POL 200 helped them understand material in other POL classes. Of the 25 students who responded to the question, 80% said they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that POL 200 made it easier to understand political science research in other courses. Students were also asked about whether they used Stata and other tools learned in POL 200 in future courses and how frequently they did so. Of the 16 respondents (64%) who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they used Stata in other courses, 7 said they used Stata in 1 other course, 3 in two other courses, 3 in three other courses, and 3 in more than three other courses. Those students who did not use quantitative methods reported in an open-ended questions that they did not because they did not feel comfortable using the tools, or their research projects were not conducive to quantitative analysis.

Finally, students were asked about demand for more methodological training. Just under 50% of the students reported that they would have taken an advanced quantitative methodology course and 80% of the seniors surveyed said they would have taken an advance qualitative methodology course had one been offered. Currently, the Department only offers one course in quantitative methods and no courses in qualitative methods.

Overall, the responses regarding the Department's methodology training are positive. All Political Science majors are being training in statistical methods common to the social sciences, and most of the respondents reported increased ability to understand scholar research in the field because of that training. Further, the Department is very pleased to see a majority of the students feel comfortable enough with their training to conduct quantitative studies in at least one other course during their time at TCNJ. Still, the data show there is work to be done. Several students commented that they never felt comfortable using statistical software in POL 200 and were hesitant to use it in future classes. Other students reported that they did not have the opportunity to use quantitative methods in other classes. The survey also shows clear demand for more advanced training in both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Appendix I: Political Science Department Learning Goals

- 1.To develop each student’s understanding of political science (and politics), key substantive knowledge in the discipline and its major fields, and the connections between political science and related fields, especially economics, history, international studies, law, and public policy.
- 2.To lead students to examine the workings of fundamental political processes and institutions at the local, national, and international level while offering them the opportunity to explore a subfield of political science in more depth.
- 3.To have students appreciate the meaning and historical evolution of the core values in Western political thought such as justice, equality, freedom, human rights, and due process; understand competing theoretical perspectives; and develop their own belief systems.
- 4.To mentor students in developing advanced skills in critical thinking sothat they may read analytically, understand complex relationships and concepts, identify underlying assumptions, and “dissect” a scholarly text.
- 5.To teach students to conduct original research, independently and in teams, using scholarly sources and the empirical research tools characteristic of the discipline.
- 6.To refine the communications skills of students so that they can present oral and written arguments that are cogent, compelling, and wellsubstantiated.
- 7.To develop in students the ability to locate themselves and see otherswithin an historical, social, and cultural setting.
- 8.To engage students in first hand experiences with practical politics and public policy and suggest to them connections between what they learn in the classroom and what goes on in the world.
- 9.To engage students actively in the learning process so as to stimulate their curiosity, interest them in public life, foster openness, and increase their self confidence.
- 10.To prepare students for meaningful employment and further educational opportunities after graduation, in part through internship and independent research oppor

Appendix II: descriptive statistics used in the assessment report.

Values under “Mean” column show proportion of seniors who responded with “Most of the time” or “Nearly Always”

year	Summary of How often courses were challenging		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Freq.
2013	.62962963	.49210288	27
2014	.53333333	.50741626	30

Total | .57894737 .49811675 57
 Difference between sample proportions
 z score = .735 ; two-tailed p-value = .462

Summary of How often courses were intellectually stimulating			
year	Mean	Std. Dev.	Freq.
2013	.85185185	.36201399	27
2014	.8	.4068381	30

Total | .8245614 .3837227 57
 Difference between sample proportions
 z score = .514 ; two-tailed p-value = .607

Summary of How often courses were useful for personal or professional development			
year	Mean	Std. Dev.	Freq.
2013	.59259259	.50071174	27
2014	.5	.50854763	30

Total | .54385965 .50250002 57
 Difference between sample proportions
 z score = .701 ; two-tailed p-value = .483

Summary of How often courses were informative about key concepts in poli sci			
year	Mean	Std. Dev.	Freq.
2013	.88888889	.32025631	27
2014	.86666667	.3457459	30

Total | .87719298 .33113309 57
 Difference between sample proportions
 z score = .255 ; two-tailed p-value = .799

Summary of How often courses were helpful for interpreting current events			
year	Mean	Std. Dev.	Freq.
2013	.74074074	.44657608	27
2014	.83333333	.37904902	30

Total | .78947368 .41130637 57
 Difference between sample proportions
 z score = -.856 ; two-tailed p-value = .392

eval

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 range: [1,16] units: 1
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tabulation: Freq. Numeric Label
 60 1 conduct research

60	2	give prof. oral presentation
60	3	write legal brief
60	4	write compelling analysis of issue/policy
60	5	read/understand journal articles
60	6	understand complex relationships and abstract concepts
60	7	run regression
60	8	apply for job
60	9	apply for internship
60	10	write resume
60	11	attend graduate school
60	12	understand key poli sci concepts
60	13	evaluate content sources
60	14	work with those who are different
60	15	discuss core concepts of Western poli thought
60	16	participate in politics/civic life

Question 1

2013: mean = 86 sd = 13.6
 2014: mean = 81.8 sd = 17.7
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 4.1938462
 t score = .945 ; two-tailed p-value = .349

Question 2

2013: mean = 84 sd = 20.4
 2014: mean = 85.2 sd = 16.3
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -1.2307692
 t score = -.238 ; two-tailed p-value = .813

Question 3

2013: mean = 48.8 sd = 39.2
 2014: mean = 49.4 sd = 29
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -.60833333
 t score = -.062 ; two-tailed p-value = .951

Question 4

2013: mean = 74.9 sd = 23.2
 2014: mean = 75.4 sd = 16.2
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -.50461538
 t score = -.09 ; two-tailed p-value = .928

Question 5

2013: mean = 87.7 sd = 13.9
 2014: mean = 84.8 sd = 14.1
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 2.8723077
 t score = .733 ; two-tailed p-value = .467

Question 6

2013: mean = 79.3 sd = 15.1
 2014: mean = 77.3 sd = 13.5
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 2.0123077
 t score = .502 ; two-tailed p-value = .618

Question 7

2013: mean = 68.2 sd = 29.9
 2014: mean = 57.1 sd = 35.1
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 11.12
 t score = 1.206 ; two-tailed p-value = .234

Question 8

2013: mean = 66.2 sd = 29.3
 2014: mean = 72.7 sd = 29
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -6.4455128
 t score = -.782 ; two-tailed p-value = .438

Question 9

2013: mean = 75.8 sd = 27.3

2014: mean = 79.2 sd = 28
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -3.3538462
 t score = -.433 ; two-tailed p-value = .667
 Question 10
 2013: mean = 71.6 sd = 29.9
 2014: mean = 75.8 sd = 27
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -4.2628205
 t score = -.529 ; two-tailed p-value = .599
 Question 11
 2013: mean = 80 sd = 23.6
 2014: mean = 75.2 sd = 31.8
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 4.8061538
 t score = .611 ; two-tailed p-value = .544
 Question 12
 2013: mean = 87.6 sd = 14.3
 2014: mean = 85.9 sd = 10.9
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 1.7153846
 t score = .483 ; two-tailed p-value = .631
 Question 13
 2013: mean = 80.3 sd = 22.7
 2014: mean = 85.7 sd = 18.1
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -5.4123077
 t score = -.943 ; two-tailed p-value = .35
 Question 14
 2013: mean = 86.3 sd = 18.6
 2014: mean = 87 sd = 13.9
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = -.64153846
 t score = -.14 ; two-tailed p-value = .889
 Question 15
 2013: mean = 85 sd = 17.2
 2014: mean = 83.5 sd = 13.4
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 1.5
 t score = .349 ; two-tailed p-value = .729
 Question 16
 2013: mean = 85.3 sd = 21.1
 2014: mean = 78.6 sd = 26.4
 mean(2013) - mean(2014) = 6.7046154
 t score = .999 ; two-tailed p-value = .323