

Political Science Concentration Assessment Report

AY 2013-14

The Political Science concentration scheduled the written communication (CLO 1) for review during AY 2013-14. Both full time Political Science faculty engaged in the assessment process for CLO 1. Both faculty used the Written Communication VALUE Rubric provided by the UHWO Writing Assessment committee. Since this value rubric was provided half way through the Fall semester, assessment was done twice by both faculty, once using their own rubrics, and the second time, using the VALUE rubric provided.

Table 1 outlines a summary of the Political Science concentration's assessment efforts during the Fall semester of 2013. One tenured Full Professor and one non-tenure track Associate Professor participated in the assessment. Due to the small number of the Political Science faculty, two upper division Writing Intensive designated courses were assessed. One course was delivered online and one course was in person.

Table 1. Summary of Political Science concentration assessment efforts during AY 2013-14

Assessing Faculty	Faculty Rank	Course Alpha	Sections Assessed	Course Level	Course Modality
Dr. Herman	Professor	POLS 308 WI	1	Upper	In-person
Dr. Mironesco	Associate	POLS 316 WI	1	Upper	Online

Procedures

All students in both of the classes were assessed. As both classes assessed were designated as WI courses, the enrollment was capped at 20 for each course. POLS 308: Science and the Modern Prospect had 19 students and POLS 316: Constitutional Law started out at 17 students at the midterm point, and finished with 16 by the time the final paper was turned in. Both Political Science faculty met at the Spring 2014 UHWO Professional Development Day to discuss their assessment reports. The Political Science faculty met twice more during the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester to discuss their findings and discern strengths and weaknesses of student written communication. They then discussed recommendations for program changes.

Findings

Written Communication. The written communication VALUE rubric evaluates student writing on five dimensions: 1) context and purpose for writing, 2) content development, 3) genre and disciplinary conventions, 4) sources and evidence, and 5) control of syntax and language. The UHWO Assessment Committee modified the original VALUE rubric to score these dimensions on a 3-point scale (0-2) of beginning (0), progressing (1) and advanced (2) performance.

Table 2 shows that across both course sections evaluated, the mean scores for each written communication rubric dimension increased between 0.2 and 0.3 rating points from the first to the second assignment. This increase in writing performance showed that students were learning to write better as they progress through a given Political Science course. This increase in writing performance was likely due to receiving instructional feedback from the first written assignment which improved writing skills for the second assignment.

Table 2. Mean scores for each written communication VALUE rubric dimension for the first and second written assignments as well as in-person and online course delivery modalities.

Pre-test verses Post-test Performance	Written Rubric Dimensions				
	Purpose	Content	Genre	Source	Mechanics
Paper 1	1.01	0.96	.88	.65	.9
Paper 2	1.2	1.28	1.17	.94	1.22
In-person verses Online Performance	Written Rubric Dimensions				
	Purpose	Content	Genre	Source	Mechanics
In-person	1.03	1.0	.96	.76	1.27
Online	1.17	1.24	1.1	.83	.85

The mean change between paper 1 and 2 comparing in-person and online student writing performance was tabulated in the bottom section of Table 2. The writing performance improved significantly in the “purpose,” “content,” “genre,” and “source” for both modes of delivery and proportionately more in the online class. The lowest scores were given in the source and evidence category. There was an anomalous drop in the quality of the mechanics category for the online class. The widest disparity between the online and in person courses is also in that last mechanics category.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The drop in the mechanics category for the online class appeared to be an artifact of the difference between the two papers. Students chose a new topic for the second research paper

which requires considerable effort in the categories of “purpose, content, genre and source” (see attached discussion). The disparity in the Mechanics category between online and in person courses, as well as the overall lower scores in the Source category, suggested that additional instruction, perhaps from the library staff or an online tutorial on library research, as well as concerning what constitutes strong and credible academic evidence might be in order. The faculty teaching online courses could also work more closely with the No’eau Center to reach out to students who need the additional help with writing mechanics. The Political Science Faculty is making the following recommendations to improve student learning in written communication:

- 1) Work with library staff to create an online tutorial for library searches in Political Science and provide the link to students when the course begins.
- 2) Provide Political Science students with additional resources for writing help through connecting them with the No’eau Center for Writing, Math and Academic Success.
- 3) Use the rubric in class as an instruction aid to help students become more aware of the dimensions of effective writing.

Political Science Course Level Academic Assessment Reporting Form

Prof. Louis Herman

Semester/year: Fall 2013 Course alpha: POLS 308 WI Course Title: Science and the Modern Prospect

Course instructor: Louis Herman

Instructor rank: Professor

Modality of the course (underline one): In-person

Academic Division: Social Sciences

Academic Concentration: Political Science

Student Learning Outcome assessed (provide complete SLO language):

CLO 1: Students will demonstrate effective writing skills in evaluating the role of the method of science in shaping the worldview and politics of modernity. (Alignment with: ILO 1, DLO 1, CLO 1, GLO 1). The course was set at a “moderate” level of proficiency.

Assessment procedures (provide a description of the methods used to conduct the assessment):

This class used a combination of informal and formal writing about the history, strengths and weaknesses of the scientific method and its contribution to the world view of modernity. The informal writing consisted of weekly journals and in class reaction papers to films and reading. Assessment focused on the formal writing for the course: two 5-10 page papers with an outline and rough draft submitted for the midterm paper. Students were required to workshop their rough drafts during small group discussion periods. Both papers require critical evaluation and synthesis of variegated class material following the modified Socratic Method a.k.a the classical philosophical truth quest.

For this assessment cycle, the instructor used a qualitative A, B, C grade designation in addition to the “Written Communication Value Rubric” provided by the Assessment Committee to ascertain progress. The results are outlined below.

Table 1: Midterm Paper Scores

Writing Dimension	Mean Scores
Context of/and purpose for writing	.92
Content Development	.82
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	.88
Sources and Evidence	.64
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	.86
Total Score (10 possible)	4.12

N: 19 students

Advanced (2) – Progressing (1) – Beginning (0)

Table 2: Final Paper Scores

Writing Dimension	Mean Scores
Context of/and purpose for writing	1.13
Content Development	1.17
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	1.03
Sources and Evidence	.88
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	1.68
Total Score (10 possible)	5.89

N: 19 students (one student withdrew from the course)

Advanced (2) – Progressing (1) – Beginning (0)

Table 3: Score Change over the course of the semester

Writing Dimension	Mean Score Change
Context of/and purpose for writing	0.21
Content Development	0.35
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	0.15
Sources and Evidence	0.24
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	0.30

As the tables indicated students showed a pleasing overall improvement in all the rubric dimensions given the level of proficiency of the class designation. The dimension of content development and mastery of disciplinary conventions were particularly challenging for students, since the course required a wide reach and a deep grasp of big issues. Not only were students expected to grasp the nature of the scientific method, its strengths and limits, but they were had to understand its contribution to the political philosophy of classical Liberalism and evaluate both science and the resultant worldview accordingly. Students struggled with the first paper because of the interdisciplinary reach of the class. The instructor gave detailed feedback on the first paper and students were required to workshop the question in discussion groups. This helped considerably. They were then encouraged to use the revised first paper as scaffolding for the final paper which asked the evaluative question. Students were thus able to build directly on early learning; they could wordsmith the final paper and

fine-tune organization. While this conceptual exertion seems to result in relative neglect of the dimension of sources and evidence, it did produce significantly better written and better argued papers. In the future, scores might be improved by using the writing dimensions rubric more directly as a teaching tool earlier in the class. On the whole, the class seems to be achieving its objectives and students gaining the desired outcomes.

Appendix A

Political Science Concentration Course Level Assessment Reports

Course Level Academic Assessment Reporting Form

Semester/year: Fall 2013 Course alpha: POLS 316 WI Course title: Constitutional Law

Course instructor: Monique Mironesco Instructor rank: Associate Professor

Modality of the course (underline one): In-person Online Hybrid

Academic Division: Social Sciences Academic Concentration: Political Science

Student Learning Outcome assessed (provide complete SLO language):

SLO 4: Students will write critically concerning ethical issues in Constitutional Law

Student learning outcome alignment (identify the CLO, DLO, GELO and/or ILO aligned with the SLO being assessed):

SLO 4 corresponds with the following: ILO 1, DLO 1, CLO 1, GLO 1

Assessment procedures (provide a description of the methods used to conduct the assessment):

This class uses a combination of informal and formal writing about Constitutional Law. The informal writing consists of weekly journal analyses in reaction to the course lectures as well as written critical questions and responses in relation to the (very challenging) course reading on civil rights and liberties in constitutional law. This assessment exercise only focused on the formal writing for the course: a 6-7 page midterm paper, and a 9-10 page final paper. Both are research papers. For the midterm paper, the students propose topics and then vote on a topic which the entire class answers. For the final paper, students choose their own research topics, provided that there is no overlap with the midterm paper topic.

Due to the fact that this is a Writing Intensive class, there is extensive feedback provided to the students, both from the instructor as well as peers. Each assignment requires students to turn in a paper thesis and outline to the instructor, which she returns with comments and suggestions. Students then proceed to write a first draft and send it to one of their peers (the person following them in the alphabetical class list for the midterm, and preceding them for the final). The peers provide feedback using Microsoft Word's Track Changes and then submit the draft back to their peers, providing a copy for the instructor. Once the paper is revised, it is turned in for grading to the instructor. She provides extensive feedback to each student on the midterm paper, also using Track Changes, as well as returning a writing rubric for each student. The rubric is available on the course website starting on the first day of classes, so students understand what is expected of them.

For this assessment cycle, the instructor used her own writing rubric in the class. However, in addition, she also assessed both the midterm and final papers with the "Written Communication Value Rubric" provided by the Assessment Committee in order to discern whether students were making progress in the course. The results are outlined below.

Assessment findings (provide a description of the assessment results found with a table that summarizes the rubric scores assigned to student works):

As the tables below with the mean scores for each writing dimension on the common UHWO Written Communication Rubric indicate, students show modest improvement over the course of the semester. They increased their mean scores in all of the rubric dimensions except for the last one, “control of syntax and mechanics” where their scores dropped by 0.19 points. While this course is an upper division course with a relatively low number (316), the course content is extremely challenging, requiring students to read difficult case law, sometimes written in a complicated legal style. It is not surprising that the assessment report includes few advanced students in written communication. The two largest increases (0.5 and 0.35 respectively) came in the “genre and disciplinary conventions” and “sources and evidence” dimensions. The two dimensions “context of/and purpose for writing” and “content development” both garnered modest increases of 0.15 and 0.28 respectively.

Table 1: Midterm Paper Scores

Writing Dimension	Mean Scores
Context of/and purpose for writing	1.1
Content Development	1.1
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	.88
Sources and Evidence	.65
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	.94
Total Score (10 possible)	4.67

N: 17 students

Advanced (2) – Progressing (1) – Beginning (0)

Table 2: Final Paper Scores

Writing Dimension	Mean Scores
Context of/and purpose for writing	1.25
Content Development	1.38
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	1.31
Sources and Evidence	1
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	.75
Total Score (10 possible)	5.69

N: 16 students (one student withdrew from the course)

Advanced (2) – Progressing (1) – Beginning (0)

Table 3: Score Change over the course of the semester

Writing Dimension	Mean Score Change
Context of/and purpose for writing	0.15
Content Development	0.28
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	0.5
Sources and Evidence	0.35
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	-0.19

Assessment conclusions (provide an interpretation of the assessment results found in terms of student learning strengths and weaknesses):

The extensive instructor feedback provided to the students on their midterm paper focuses heavily on the two dimensions which made the largest gains (“genre and disciplinary conventions” and “sources and evidence”), so these are clearly strengths of the peer and instructor feedback to the midterm paper. Students are encouraged to go back to their midterms before they start the final paper, so that they can see where they needed to improve. This process seems to be working to improve student understanding of these two dimensions.

The students are expected to critically read the course textbook, which should enable them to demonstrate content knowledge and the context within which the reading and writing for the class occurs. The course lectures are used to supplement and provide context for the case law found in the reading. The data seems to reflect that the students are progressing along in these two dimensions, making modest gains in their scores as reflected in their formal written work, but clearly more could be done to improve these two dimensions.

The single dimension with the lower scores, “control of syntax and mechanics” is problematic and is clearly identified as a weakness in the students’ written communication and the way the final paper assignment is chosen. The final paper assignment requires more formal written pages than the midterm, and as mentioned above, students choose their own topics. Some students choose a topic and then deem that they cannot find enough research on it to warrant the 9-10 page requirement. They tend to change topics at this point, reducing the amount of time they have to complete the overall assignment. Invariably, one of the written communication dimensions will lose out, because they run out of time to properly revise and edit their papers before turning in the final draft. Sometimes, they rely heavily on their peers for editing assistance, some of which may or may not be accurate. To remedy this situation, it would be helpful to encourage the students to choose their topics earlier in order to promote starting the research process earlier as well. This may assist the students to avoid

procrastination, enabling them to revise and edit their work more carefully before their turn the final assignment into the instructor for grading.