

Seaver College General Education Assessment—American Experience (POSC 104) -- Academic Year 2011-2012

You will find the [Office of Institutional Effectiveness web site](#) and the [Program Review Guidebook](#) to be valuable resources when assessing the General Education program.

I. Program Learning Outcome

Students identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped America's democracy and its diverse society and apply that knowledge to develop a personal vision about its meaning.

II. Institutional Educational Outcomes (Objectives)

The GE Program Learning Outcome aligns with the following IEOs.

Knowledge & Scholarship

Service

Apply knowledge to real-world challenges.

Community & Global Understanding

Purpose

Develop and enact a compelling personal and professional vision that values diversity.

III. Student Learning Outcome(s)

Indicate the student learning outcome (SLO) or outcomes for this component of the General Education program. See the OIE [website](#) for instructions on how to develop quality SLOs.

SLO 1 Students identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped America's democracy and its diverse society in the context of the discipline of political science.

SLO 2 Students identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped America's diverse society in the context of the discipline of history

SLO 3 Students apply their knowledge by developing a personal vision regarding diversity.

IV. Curriculum Map

For each SLO, indicate the course(s) where the outcome is **I**ntroduced (I), where students will **D**evelop their skills, knowledge, abilities, etc. related to the SLO (D), and where students will demonstrate **M**astery of the SLO (M) by entering I, D or M in the appropriate cell(s) of the following table. You may add or delete columns or rows as required. An exemplar curriculum map is found [here](#).

	SLO 1: Students identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped America's democracy and its diverse society in the context of the discipline of political science	SLO 2: Students identify and explain significant historical developments that have shaped America's diverse society in the context of the discipline of history	SLO 3: Students apply their knowledge by developing a personal vision regarding diversity
POSC 104	Introduced		Introduced
HIST 304		Introduced and Developed	Developed

V. Assessment Plan

Complete the following table to indicate how you will gather both direct and indirect evidence to assess student achievement for each SLO. For each assessment, be certain to fully detail the methodology that will be used to conduct the assessment.

	Direct Evidence	Indirect Evidence
SLO 1	<p>Essay questions will be developed and required in each section of POSC 104. These will ask students to identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped the American political system. Students will answer the question for SLO 1 (and 3) during finals. We will collect student papers from all sections and score the papers. That will result in a sample of approximately 50 papers. A committee of political scientists will evaluate student learning using rubrics. Eighty percent of papers should receive an acceptable or excellent (see rubrics for number values).</p> <p>The answers will be evaluated using rubrics. See Appendices A and B for more information.</p>	Alumni Survey, Question # 14
SLO 2	<p>An essay question will be developed and required in each section of HIST 304. This essay will require students to identify and explain significant historical developments that have shaped America's diverse society. Students will answer the question for SLO 2 (and 3) in late April (and/or in the Final Exam timeslot if that is what instructors prefer) in each section of HIST 304. We will collect student papers from all sections and randomly choose five responses from each section of the course. That will result in a sample of approximately 50 papers. A committee of historians will evaluate student learning using rubrics. Eighty percent of papers should receive an acceptable or excellent (see rubrics for number values).</p> <p>See Appendices A and B for more information.</p>	
SLO 3	<p>The essay in each section of HIST 304 will require students to explain how what they've learned in the classroom has affected their personal views on diversity.</p> <p>The answers will be evaluated using a rubric. See above and</p>	Students at Seaver College who have completed the American Experience requirement will

	Appendices A and B for more information	complete a survey that answers questions about how they integrated knowledge of historical diversity in the co-curriculum and in their lives.
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Provide a copy of each assessment tool (or a detailed explanation) in Appendix A.

VI. Rubrics

For the assessments identified in the Section V., provide the rubrics that will be used to evaluate the obtained evidence (data). Place the rubrics in Appendix B. Additional information on rubrics is found [here](#).

Rubric table is placed in Appendix B.

VII. Criteria/Benchmarks for Student Achievement / Success

For each assessment SLO, list the criteria or benchmarks established as an acceptable standard of student achievement. Enter this information in the blank cells of the following table.

	Criterion (Criteria)
SLO #1	80% of the papers should receive an 'acceptable' or higher according to the rubric.
SLO #2	80% of the papers should receive an 'acceptable' or higher according to the rubric.
SLO #3	80% of the papers should receive an 'acceptable' or 'excellent' according to the rubric. Survey on whether/how students integrated a historical understanding of diversity in their lives should show 80% did.

VIII. Evidence / Data

For each SLO, present in summary form the evidence/data gathered to assess the SLO. *If necessary*, use Appendix C to report raw or original data.

Collection of direct evidence and rationale: In consultation with the two other professors who teach POSC 104, it was decided that the essay exam to measure the SLO would be administered as part of the final exam to the two smaller sections. Because the class in Elkins is very big and not conducive to essay exams, it was determined that this type of assessment measure would be obstructive and take away from needed class time. We feel confident that the two course that are not taught in Elkins are a representative sample that is reflective of the course as a whole. In regards to the way in which this instrument was conducted in the two smaller sections (both around 25 students) during the final exam, there are some inherent limitations worth noting. First, the high stress of final exam time at Pepperdine might mean that students were not performing as best as they could and/or that because the exam was a portion to a larger exam that they did not have an appropriate amount of time. However, we felt that conducting an exam at the end of the course to students who are prepared to take a comprehensive final would produce

a real sense of how much students learned in class rather than administering it to them at another point in the semester.

The wording of the essay questions by Professor 1 and Professor 2 are slightly different but seek to measure the same level of student learning in a POSC 104 class:

Professor 1 Question: American politics is constantly evolving in light of new ideas, circumstances, and expectations from the public about what the government is and what it ought to be accomplishing. Identify and explain this process of political development in one of the three following areas: Civil Rights, Social Policy, or Foreign Policy. In your essay, you should accomplish three things. First, you should examine the changing nature of governmental involvement in that issue over time. Second, explain the rationale or justification that accompanied this change. Third, review some of the political controversies that this new governmental role invited.

Professor 2 Question: Identify and explain this process of political development in one of the three following areas: Civil Rights, Civil Liberties, or Environmental Rights. In your essay, you should accomplish three things. First, you should examine the changing nature of governmental involvement in that issue over time. Second, explain three related cases and the rationale or justification that accompanied this change. Third, review some of the political controversies/challenges that these Supreme Court decisions invited. Finally, use your knowledge of the Founding to discuss if you think the Framers of the Constitution would be satisfied/dissatisfied/neither about the current state of the Supreme Court in American politics.

After the final exam, the essays were collected by both professors and all scored according to the rubric. Since the large Elkins class was not used, it was not necessary to pick out a random sample of papers—all the papers in both POSC 104 classes were scored which came to a total of 46 papers. Overall, 35 out of 46 papers or 76% of the students performed at ‘advanced’ or ‘excellent’ according to the rubric, 3 students or 7% performed at the ‘average’ level and 8 students or 17% of the students performed below average/unacceptable on the essay exam.

Collection of Indirect Evidence was done through an alumni survey (HEDS survey). On the relevant question of civic engagement (#9), a reported 32.7% of students stated that the GE curriculum “somewhat” and another 31.3% stated that it “sufficiently” contributed to their personal development. On the survey question most obviously related (#14) that asked students how the GE curriculum contributed to their knowledge of the “political and historical developments that shaped America’s diverse society,” 21.05% reported that it “considerably” and a high percentage of 42.6% reported that it “sufficiently” did so. From the direct evidence it can be determined that the American Experience GE component is meeting its goal of increasing understanding about American development. However, greater understanding does not seem to be extending into a similar increase in civic engagement.

IX. Summary

Based on the evidence reported in the previous section, summarize the findings in narrative form. In the summary, be certain to address the following questions. Also, be certain to reference the appropriate evidence / data supporting each finding / conclusion.

1. Are the SLOs being met at the appropriate level of achievement based upon the criteria / benchmarks defined? Stated differently, are students learning at an appropriate level for this component of the GE program?
2. Is the GE requirement as described in the catalog appropriate or does it need to be revised?

For the most part, the data supports the conclusion the POSC 104 course is meeting SLO 1 that “students identify and explain significant political and historical developments that have shaped America’s democracy and its diverse society in the context of the discipline of political science.” A high percentage, 83% of the students, in which direct evidence was collected from displayed average to advanced levels of knowledge. The ‘excellent/above average’ student papers were characterized by strong thesis statements, a depth of knowledge and ability to identify and explain critical developments in American politics. The highest level of students performing at this level were able to make extensive links between American politics past and the present and were able to expertly discuss continuing controversies that involve the topic they chose to write about.

Students performing at the ‘average level’ provided decent thesis statements and the relevant facts but did not have the connective tissue where they could link different political events discussed in their essays. Instead of being fluid—these essays seemed a bit disjointed and lacking a firm grasp of the course material. Students performing at the below average level had little to no sign of a thesis statement, sometimes provided a reasonable number of facts but made no attempt to link it to change over time. It is interesting to note that a greater percentage of students (17%) performed at the ‘below average’ level than at the ‘average’ level (7%) of learning.

A note about SLO 3:

Jolting students out of their “comfort zones” and producing a well-rounded, critical thinking individual, is an obligation of any university. In fact, much of democratic theory resounds with the idea that we need a literate and active citizenry in order to keep a well functioning republic (Dewey, 1916). The reasoning behind this is that critical debate allows for understanding of differences and thereby more tolerance. Of course, this works only when civil discourse is engaged in by a variety of participants. Hence, universities should attempt to instill a deeper appreciation for a diverse dialogue alongside basic and specialized knowledge. Though, we did not poll directly for SLO 3 that “students apply their knowledge by developing a personal vision regarding diversity,” we were still able to get a sense of how topics in this course expanded students conception of diversity. The essay questions used by both instructors touched on issues of diversity. Professor 2 used civil rights, civil liberties, and gender. Professor 1 used civil rights, social policy, and foreign policy as the essay prompts. In many of the student responses they exhibited a strong sense about how their own understandings of these areas have grown/changed over time.

In conclusion, we do not recommend revising the course content of the Seaver College manual (page 82) as far as POSC 104 is concerned. The GE requirement as explained in the catalog appropriately describes what students taking POSC 104 will learn.

X. Recommendations (Closing the Loop)

What recommendations are necessary to correct weaknesses or improve this area of the General Education program? For each recommendation, reference the supporting evidence and briefly describe the expected outcome. All recommendations should be resource neutral.

Additionally, if you propose revision of the catalog content on pages 77-87 of the 2012-2013 Seaver College catalog (<http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/academics/content/2012seavercatalog.pdf>) indicate the proposed revised content as an action item.

You may propose as few as one or as many as four (or more) action items. However, acting on fewer changes is likely more realistic than acting on numerous changes at one time. For this reason, prioritize all action items in order of importance and limit action items to those supported by compelling evidence.

One area where we could improve is to be explicit about teaching on political development. The students who performed at the ‘average’ and ‘below average’ levels, exhibited difficulty in linking important political events over time. For example, in regards to the development of civil rights: some students could not link the Reconstruction Amendments to Jim Crow laws to Brown v. Board of Education. Instead, students treated these as discreet topics. To overcome this hurdle, it is recommended that professors be more deliberate in making connections in their teaching between different political events and implement new kinds of assignments that help students think about political development over a long period of time.

If we base program changes solely on evidence gathered then the results of our direct evidence bears out only the above in terms of an action item. The vast majority of the students appear to be learning what they need to be. However, our mission as political science faculty and as a school committed to the education of all students. It is evident that the bottom 1/6th of students are not learning what they need to learn. Now this could be as a result of students who miss class and do not take the class seriously but it also could be as a result of cultural barriers. While, the direct evidence collected did not test for this—it is the belief of the faculty of POSC 104 that many international students struggle with this course. Many (certainly not all) international students have very different type of governments than the United States and they are tasked with learning about an entire new government from the Founding until the present. This is a considerable task for students who are used to the way our government functions—or at the very least—in which our government operations are normalized. In accordance with this concern, we propose that moving forwards, we look for ways to test for this and think creatively about ways to meet this concern.

XI. Contributors

Assessment of this area of the General Education program was performed by the following individual(s).

Committee Chairperson	Position Title	Academic Division
Megan Francis Darlene Rivas (fall) / Stewart Davenport (spring)	Assistant Professor of Political Science and Professor of History/ Associate Professor of History	Social Science and Humanities and Teacher Education

Committee Members	Position Title	Academic Division
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Christopher Soper	Professor of Political Science	Social Science
Brian Newman	Associate Professor of Political Science	Social Science

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Assessment Details

The following assessment was used to assess Student Learning Outcome #__1__.

Essay: Please read over the essay question carefully. In your essay response, provide an argument and bring in your knowledge of the readings and lecture in your answer. Note: It might help to sketch a rough outline to ensure you stay on message. [50 points each]

Question 1: American politics is constantly evolving in light of new ideas, circumstances, and expectations from the public about what the government is and what it ought to be accomplishing. Identify and explain this process of political development in one of the three following areas: Civil Rights, Social Policy, or Foreign Policy. In your essay, you should accomplish three things. First, you should examine the changing nature of governmental involvement in that issue over time. Second, explain the rationale or justification that accompanied this change. Third, review some of the political controversies that this new governmental role invited.

Question 2: Identify and explain this process of political development in one of the three following areas: Civil Rights, Civil Liberties, or Environmental Rights. In your essay, you should accomplish three things. First, you should examine the changing nature of governmental involvement in that issue over time. Second, explain three related cases and the rationale or justification that accompanied this change. Third, review some of the political controversies/challenges that these Supreme Court decisions invited. Finally, use your knowledge of the Founding to discuss if you think the Framers of the Constitution would be satisfied/dissatisfied/neither about the current state of the Supreme Court in American politics.

Appendix B - Rubrics

The following rubric was used to analyze the evidence gathered in assessment of Student Learning Outcome(s) #_ 1____.

{Repeat and edit the above text as necessary for each rubric.}

General Assessment: American Experience

POSC 104 Assessment Rubric

Standard	Unacceptable/Below Average 0-3	Acceptable 4-7	Excellent/Above Average 8-10	Score
Introduction and Thesis Statement	Expectations have not been met. Papers doesn't introduce its arguments and/or basic content or done so in a sloppy way. Thesis is obscure or non-existent.	Paper introduces its contents in a satisfactory manner. However, the thesis statement is not strong and merely hints at arguments and/or the introduction is not concise/clear in several instances	The paper introduces its themes in an intriguing way, the introduction is concise. Thesis statement previews the paper's most important arguments.	
Identification of Political Developments in Shaping America's Democracy	Shows only basic knowledge of political developments and controversies; Misidentifies or lacks relevant evidence (events, people, concepts, dates) related to topic	Accurately identifies relevant political developments and controversies (events, people, concepts) related to topic; may lack some relevant details or make minor errors	Accurately and thoroughly identifies relevant political developments and controversies (events, people, concepts) related to topic	
Explanation of Changing Nature of Governmental Involvement Over Time	Offers simplistic explanations; Fails to explain the political and historical development of American democracy and/or mischaracterizes it; lacks awareness of or shows simplistic political science thinking; lacks understanding of the relationship of the past to the present	Makes clear explanations about the American political system; may be more summary and descriptive than analytical; demonstrates understanding of the role of change over time and makes reasonable connections between the past and the present	Makes clear and sophisticated descriptions to explain different features of American Politics; is clearly analytical; demonstrates understanding of the role of change over time, and makes thoughtful connections between the past and the present	

Total _____

Appendix C - Evidence /Data (Optional)

The following evidence was gathered in assessment of Student Learning Outcome #_1_.

Data (essays) kept in a folder in my office.

Appendix D - Chronology

The committee met and performed activities in support of this assessment as indicated below. Please add additional rows as necessary.

Date	Members Participating (Initials)	Action
9/20/2011	MF, DR	Wrote Program SLO, Developed Curriculum Map, and Assessment Plan
10/19/2011	MF, DR	Developed responses to possible revisions to the document
11/17/2011	MF, DR	Met with Michael Feltner and Nate Klemp to discuss revisions
12/2/2011	DR	Revised SLOs, developed draft rubrics, etc
12/8/2011	MF	Revised Appendix A & B for political science
2/2/2011	MF, SD	Meet and discuss assessment and collection of direct evidence
3/21/2011	MF, CS, BN	Meet to discuss conducting essay exams to POSC 104 students
4/18/2011	MF, CS	Finalize essay exam question
5/3/2011	MF, CS	Discuss graded papers according to rubric
5/10-5/18/2011	MF	