Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

Department/Program Political Science

1) Have formal learning outcomes for the department’s Core courses been developed? What are they? (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

Our department’s learning outcomes are derived from those specified by the A&S Undergraduate Core Development Committee (UCDC) as Core Social Science course learning goals, and have been in force as guidelines for our assessments since 2012. Political Science Core courses should improve students’

a. awareness of and sensitivity to the political dimensions of their human existence.

b. awareness of the causes of human behavior.

c. awareness of the dynamics and dimensions of political change.

d. ability to identify and appreciate the social scientific dimension of problems facing society today

2) Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific. (Where are the department’s expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

Learning outcomes are published on the Political Science Department’s Undergraduate Programs webpage. See: http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/undergrad/learningoutcomes.html

3) Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement? (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

A simple four-question, multiple-choice quiz is given to most of the students enrolled in Core courses each semester.

The quizzes were developed to elicit student responses to questions tethered to the four learning outcomes set forth above. Core course instructors were each asked to craft four of these questions for their courses, with the following guidelines in mind. Each question should (1) reflect important material covered in their course and (2) align conceptually with one of the four learning outcomes. Thus, for each learning outcome, the instructor constructed one question. This means that the resulting four-question quizzes were not uniform across the Core courses or sections. Instead they were tailored to fit the course and sections, which vary in terms of content covered. However, all of the quizzes have the same internal structure, with the first question aligned with the first learning goal, the second question aligned with the second learning goal, and so on.

4) Who interprets the evidence? What is the process? (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)
The Political Science Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) puts the quizzes in a standard format and returned them to the instructors with scantron forms. The instructors administer the quizzes at the end of the semester. The students’ responses are anonymous. The completed scantrons are returned to the DUS, who then sends them to the BC scanning office for processing. Next, the DUS aggregates the data across courses and analyzes it in terms of general patterns and trends over time. Then the DUS reports out the analysis and findings in three ways. First, the assessment is incorporated into the Department Chair’s annual report to the Dean’s office each June. Second, it is also briefed to political science faculty at large in a department meeting at the start of the Fall semester, and discussed. Third, also over the summer, the DUS sends back the aggregate and section-specific data to the relevant instructors, with general notes concerning areas were improvements or adjustments may be warranted. In respect to the latter, instructors exercise their own judgment and discretion. Because our Core courses vary widely in their content, it is neither wise nor feasible for the DUS to prescribe specific remedies.