First Exam Assessment Review Report  
GC Political Science Program

The purpose of this review is to examine how effectively an assessment helps you to determine whether students have learned or achieved what you want them to learn or achieve at a given stage in the program based on the goals you have set for them.

The following items should be included in a 1-2 page report to the Provost to be submitted by March 15th, 2016 and a short presentation at a spring 2016 cluster meeting for your discipline.

1) Statement of the learning goals for the assessment that you are reviewing.

   First Exam Learning Goals (as revised by the program’s Curriculum Committee as a result of this review): The first exam tests students’ breadth of knowledge of the discipline and their abilities to communicate knowledge through writing. Specifically, the exam tests students’ abilities to work accurately and critically with theories, including the application of those theories to empirical material or texts. Questions are designed to test students’ understanding of major scholarship, debates, and applications in their chosen areas.

2) A description of what data or other information you are drawing on to conduct your review (e.g., students’ exam results, students’ job placements).

   The program’s Curriculum Committee examined the following data/materials:
   a) Preparation materials available to students for the first exam, such as reading lists, previous exams, and grading rubrics.
   b) Student survey data collected by students on Survey Monkey on student opinions about the exam.
   c) Actual course selection and sequencing prior to taking the exam for students entering the program since 2009.
   d) Composition and rotation of exam grading committees.
   e) Student performance in relation to student’s course selection, GPA, GRE (verbal), gender, and race and ethnicity.

3) Your findings. Is the assessment (and preparation for it) effective? Please include examples of the ways in which the assessment is and is not successful in accomplishing the goals that you have set for it.

   a) The program’s faculty and students decided that the current format of the exam was appropriate for testing students’ knowledge of the field. Exam formats from other PhD programs were considered, such as a take home exam or the production of a
publishable research paper. The other formats were considered lacking in testing the students’ thorough knowledge of the literature in two subfields appropriate for their teaching and foregrounding dissertation research.

b) Preparation materials for students are helpful but should be located online for all subfields. Currently the preparation materials for the five subfields are located at different places, making it difficult for students to find.

c) Among students enrolled from 2009-2014, there were 22 failed major or minor exams on the first attempt. In 11 of those 22 failures, the student had taken fewer than two 7000-level courses, which the program considers important for preparing for the first exam. Of the 72 students enrolled from 2009-2014, our data show that only two have failed the same exam twice.

d) The faculty composition of first exam committees for the fall semester was examined for seven years from 2009 to 2015. There was very little change in the composition of each of the grading committees in every subfield.

e) Passing rates of students of differing races and genders since 2010 were examined for each subfield. Although some correlations were observed, given the small numbers of students in our Program, their statistical and substantive significance were debated by members of the Committee. Still, all members of the CC felt that changes were merited to address even the possible perception of any disparities.

4) Proposed changes, if any, to the assessment, the learning goals for it, the curriculum/preparation leading up to it.

The program’s Curriculum Committee proposed the following changes:

a) That the learning goals be revised to reflect the program’s desire that students focus on acquiring a broad knowledge of the discipline in preparing for the first exam.

b) That the preparation materials for all the subfields be placed on Blackboard for all students to access.

c) That all subfields rotate membership on the First Examination Subfield Committee, including the chair.

5) The next steps that will be taken. (There should be a follow-up on these in the report for the next cycle.)

a) The Program will continue to meet this semester to discuss the proposed changes put forward by the Curriculum Committee.

b) The Program should continue to collect and analyze data, so that the Program can revisit these important issues in the next cycle.
Note: when changes are made as a result of an assessment review, remember to update the appropriate program materials: program website, handbook, bulletin, etc. to make sure that faculty and students are aware of the changes.